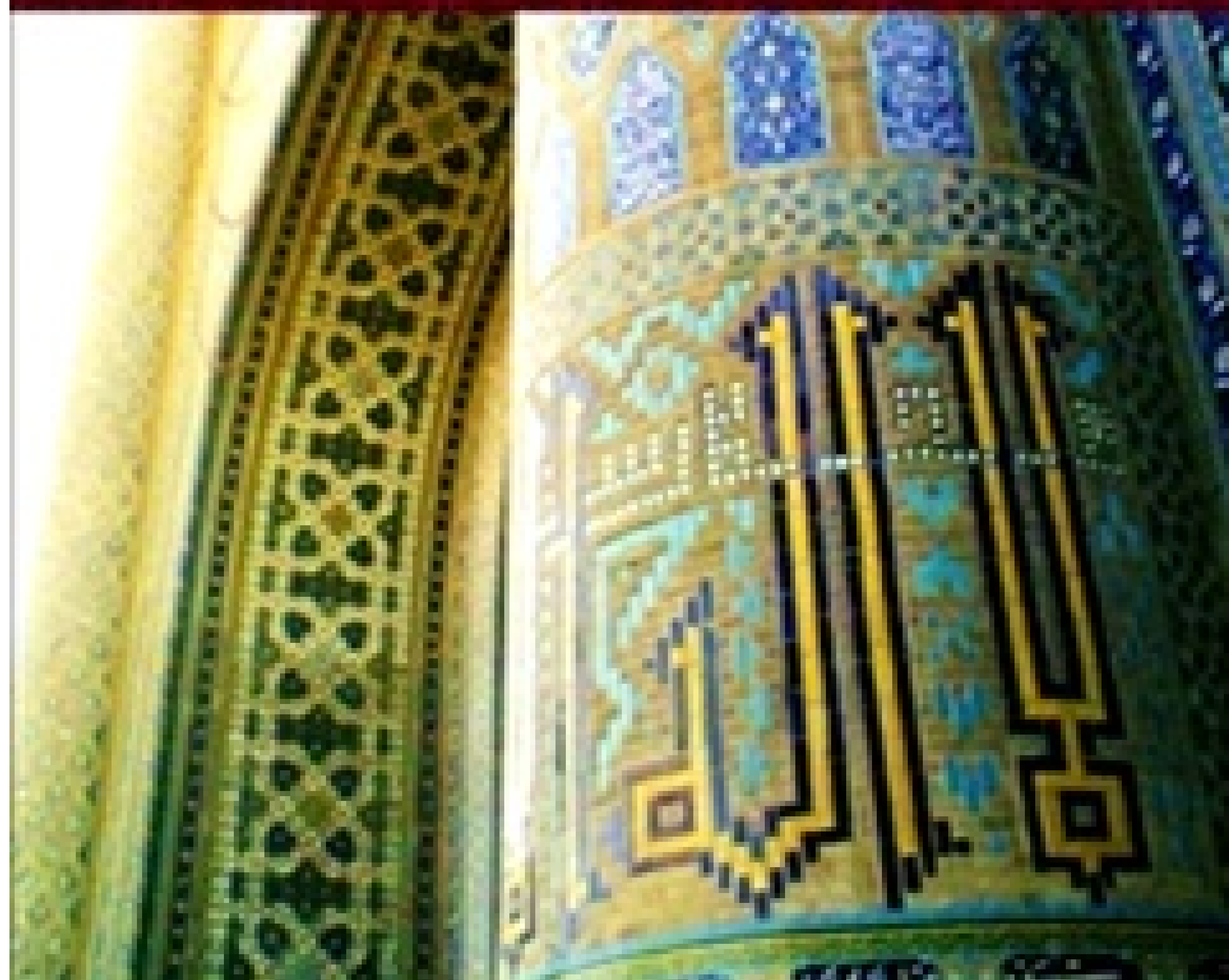
Islam, Dialogue and Civil Society

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point

Dialogues among civilizations, Islamic world and modern changes, reason and .religion, freedom and development, and traditions and modernity

Preface

This book has two main subjects. One is Dialogue among Civilizations; the other is Civil Society. By Dialogue among Civilizations, President Khatami highlights the significance of culture in international relations as a new paradigm. Such an approach delineates how civilizations can engage in fruitful Dialogue with one another, rather than .negating or being absorbed by each other

The other main topic is Civil Society. It has two aspects. One is the practical aspect, that is, how Iranian society can materialize the ideals of civil society in its political and social affairs by expanding citizenship rights and public participation. The other aspect is the theoretical one, examining how Islam is compatible with notions of freedom, .rationality, development and human rights

President Khatami underlines the importance of the relationship between these two subjects, especially with regard to Iranian society. His emphasis on Dialogue among Civilizations reflects on how Iran can interact effectively with the wider world. Iran is a country with an ancient civilization, which has benefited from Islamic civilization, and has subsequently engaged with Western civilization. It has therefore had a long history of interaction and dialogue. Drawing on this historical backdrop, President Khatami's reforms aim at building civil society in Iran, and at promoting dialogue

.among civilizations

Articles and speeches in this volume

p: ١

include those written both before and after Muhammad Khatami's election in ١٩٩٧ as President of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Dr Gholamali Khoshroo has played a significant role in the selection of the contents of the book.

Dialogue among Civilizations and the World of Islam

In the Name of Allah

The year ٢٠٠١, which has been confirmed and approved by the world as the 'Year of Dialogue among Civilizations', has certain important and noteworthy messages. Perhaps there are few topics that are accepted and embraced by the world as this has been. What follows, therefore, is a brief summary of the debate over this topic:

١. The eager approval of this suggestion indicates humanity's pressing need for dialogue and understanding.

٢. This idea, its delineation and approval, are presented at a time when we have put behind us a century of war, turmoil, usurpation, discrimination and terror. Fortunately, in these entanglements and wars, not only has the world of Islam not played any role, but rather in many instances it has itself been a victim of wars and aggressions. The two world wars have been the bloodiest of the present grievous state. These two

wars occurred in the West, at the hands of Westerners. The infringements on the rights of human beings throughout the world have occurred outside the world of .Islam

The rights of the peoples of the continents of Asia, Africa and South America, especially the oppressed people of Palestine, have been trampled upon. This inequality has been imposed even upon non-Muslim countries, which were not among industrial

nations. With this description, at the end of a century full of blood, war and turmoil, the onset of the third Christian millennium, under the umbrella of 'Dialogue and .Understanding', augurs a brighter and more promising future for the mankind

٣. Most important of all, this idea, which has been embraced by the world, was outlined by Muslims. This is testimony to the self-confidence and self-belief of the Islamic world and Muslim nations, especially in the second half of the twentieth .century

The proponent of 'Dialogue among Civilizations' is himself an heir to a strong civilization and culture. He understands relations between human beings to be comprised not of might and imposition, but of rationality and dialogue. One who values wisdom and has founded his own life on the basis of rationality, which is the origin of wisdom, speaks 'Dialogue among Civilizations'. We believe in rationality and dialogue. Religion and history have taught us this lesson. It was Muslims who .familiarized Westerners with their history of philosophy and civics

The transfer of Greek science, philosophy and wisdom first occurred as a result of Europeans' familiarity with Muslims. Europeans learned tolerance from us. It is now ironic that they suggest the moral value of tolerance to us. The great Western civilization is strongly indebted to Islamic civilization. The world of Islam is endowed

with a great civilization. Most assuredly, however, there exists a great distance .between our civilization and our present state

Dialogue among Civilizations' means equality between peoples and nations. In' .۴

p: ۳

other words, one conducts a dialogue only when one respects the other party and considers the other party as equal to oneself. The colonial relationship which has ruled over certain parts of the world in the past two or three centuries has been the result of the phenomenon of dividing peoples and nations into first- and second-class citizens: that is, nations which have an inherent right to be masters, and nations which .are inferior and have no choice but to be followers

War arises from the phenomenon of one party giving itself a greater right and, because he has power, he is entitled to serve his own interests at any cost, even at the cost, of war. Such a war is the fruit of discrimination and injustice. However, as soon as one proposes 'Dialogue among Civilizations', and it is accepted, it means that equality between nations has been accepted, and this is a great achievement for .humanity

Presently, by relying on many common elements, we Muslims must make a sincere .۵ effort to reduce differences, because a notable portion of our existing differences arises from differences in religious jurisprudence, culture, and the meaning of words, which can be eliminated. People who have not wanted the unity of the world of Islam have imposed other difficulties or, if the plan did not originate with them, they have at .least taken advantage of already existing differences by aggravating them

Thus, it is possible to eliminate differences, except for those, which are natural, for

p: ۴

people are by nature different; we do not all think alike, and we do not have identical interpretations. Therefore, in light of agreements and numerous common elements, we can minimize differences and render them a means to perfection and progress. Similar thoughts never confront each other. To have two ways of thinking set against each other is not only problem-free, but they ought to confront each other, for this .causes the evolution and perfection of the thought

What is important is that the dichotomy of thoughts not turns into disagreements, contradiction, aggression and war. In order to achieve this, we must first return to the roots of unity, and, secondly, we must understand that if we wish to hold a dialogue, .we must be inclined to wisdom and rationality

۶. One of the plagues, which can be found in religious societies, and unfortunately the world of Islam has at times been plagued by it, is the misconception that, with the existence of religion, man does not require reason. That is, to believe that one can have either reason or religion, oblivious to the fact that one can understand even .religion through reason

Does any mental tool exist other than reason? The difference between having faith and not having faith is not that a man without faith uses his reason, while a religious person is not in need of reason-they equally require the power of reason and must use it. The difference lies in the fact that a man of faith possesses

p: ۵

two books while a man without faith, one book. The source of the religious man's .knowledge is greater, and thus his achievements are richer

But a man who does not believe in God and inspiration possesses only the Book of Nature, to which he refers with the aid of his reason. A religious maxi also has this book and, as a natural human being, through the aid of his reason, he studies nature, acquires knowledge, comprehends science and philosophy, while, in addition, he

benefits from yet another Book, the Book of Divine Law and Inspiration. People who .'set religion against reason understand their flawed interpretations to be 'religion

It is true that inspiration lies beyond time and space, however, we exist in time and space. Our understanding, therefore, belongs to the realm of time and space. Thus, our understanding of the Book of Creation and Divine Laws is also limited to time and space. In this way, knowledge evolves. At one time, men of knowledge have one understanding, while at another time their understanding evolves, or perhaps the .former understanding is even negated and replaced by our present understanding

Although man is endowed with a divine spirit and it benefits from dimensions that are beyond nature, beyond time and space, a large portion of his love, feelings and thoughts are nevertheless subject to time and space. Thus a great portion of our understanding of the Book of God is limited to time and space. Those who consider their understanding of

p: ۶

God, the Book of God, and religion to be identical with 'religion', with the passage of time they are still not prepared to change their view. As a result, they sacrifice reason to their own understanding, which is limited to time and space. If we Muslims wish to have a better future and build a prosperous life for ourselves and a model for humanity that is proportional to the Greatness of God and the message of the .Prophet, we must rely on God's great blessing-reason

۷. Our identity is rooted in the past; however, this does not mean that we should return to the past. The revelation of God descended on us in the past, but it does not belong to only one time. We must refer to the past, because the roots of our identity lie in the past, but we must not remain in the past, for this would be a retreat. A reverting to the past is to find a springboard from which we may forge ahead to the .future

In order to move ahead to the future we must understand the world and benefit .٨ from all positive achievements of human thought and civilization, wherever they may be. It is only under such circumstances that we can renew the greatness and grandeur of the past and, proportional to our present and future, shape a life which is blessed with God-like attributes and inspiration, a life in which at the same time human reason and human rights are held

p: ٧

.in respect

One of the other blights is a situation where religion and freedom oppose one .٩ another. In the Middle Ages, religion was held against reason and freedom-and both suffered. Today, in liberal systems, freedom exists, but a freedom devoid of spirituality, and apart from the spiritual dimension of human life. As a consequence, their contemporary life faces many difficulties, which are admitted by Westerners .themselves

Religion without freedom is tantamount to a life of enslavement, a life in which man is devoid of honor. Religion must not be set against reason and freedom. Rather, religion is a cradle and support for the growth of reason, freedom and liberality. God's religion has taught us this lesson. By relying on these standards and many other factors, we must become prepared for a 'Dialogue among Civilizations' and convey to .the world the latent grandeur of the foundations of our religion and civilization

With an open embrace, we must benefit from the positive aspects of other .١٠ civilizations and cultures. This is in the sense of adopting, and adopting is a human art.

This is adopting where man has understood his past and his identity, has founded his life on wisdom and reason, and puts to good use what others have already achieved. .This is quite different from mere unseemly imitation

Dialogue between East and West

Text of an address by Muhammad Khatami, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran and President of the Islamic Conference Organization, to the European University .Institute, Florence, on ۱۰ March ۱۹۹۹

Attending an academic

p: ۸

gathering has always been a pleasant and enjoyable exercise for me. For in such gatherings, the proceedings most often revolve around three functions: talking, listening and understanding. Understanding results from talking and listening, and the two functions of talking and listening,, combined with looking, constitute the most important physical, psychological and spiritual activity of a human being. What is gained by looking expands one's realm of knowledge and also consolidates the .consciousness of one's own presence, the feeling that I exist

While we talk with others and listen to others, looking takes place from one's home base; from the base labeled 'I', and the world and man belong to the domain of sight, and are subjects of what I can see. But talking and listening combine to make up a bipartite-sometimes multipartite-effort to approach the truth and to reach a mutual .understanding

That is why dialogue has nothing to do with the skeptics and is not a property of those who think they are the sole proprietors of Truth. It rather reveals its beautiful but covered face only to those wayfarers who are bound on their journey of discovery .hand in hand with other human beings

The phrase, dialogue among civilizations and cultures, which should be interpreted as conversing with other civilizations and cultures, is based upon such a definition of truth, and this definition is not necessarily at odds with the well-known definitions of .truth that one finds in philosophical texts

Dialogue among civilizations requires listening to and hearing from

other civilizations and cultures, and the importance of listening to others is by no .means less than talking to others. It may be in fact more important

Talking and listening create a conversation; one side addresses the other side, and speech is exchanged. Under what circumstances is man addressed? In other words, in what kind of a world is he or she' addressed? The world of science is not the world of speeches and addresses-science is a conscious effort to discover the relationship of objects, and for this reason, scientific discourse does not transcend the level of .man's self-consciousness

But the world of art and the world of religion are the world of addressing. We are addressed by a work of art, and in religion, words of God address man. That is why the languages of mysticism and religion are linked together by genuine and profound ties, and why the earliest specimens of art that have been created by man are also specimens of Sacred Art. Man is addressed again and again in the Bible and in the Holy Qur'an, and it is with this call that the individual human being is elevated and .becomes a person

Etymologically speaking, the word 'person' is related to persona, the mask that actors would put on their face in the theatre. But= the important point here is that in the

concept of religious address, when man is being addressed by God on a general and universal level, and not in specific terms of religious teaching

and codes of conduct, none of his psychological, social or historical aspects are really being addressed. What is addressed is man's true, non-historic and individual nature, and that is why all the divine religions are not quintessentially different. The differences arise from religious laws and codes of conduct that govern the social and judicial life of human beings.

Now we must ask ourselves who is this person that is being addressed.

From the earliest times, philosophers have devoted a major part of their time and energy to answering this question. They have tried to explain how, and in what manner we may get to know man, to know him inside out, in absolute terms. The question of how one can get to know him or her; and reach the goal of self-knowledge, constitutes a major part of this philosophical quest.

Recounting the fascinating story of philosophical anthropology, and the episodes dealing with self-knowledge and self-discovery, would take several long nights in the thousand and One Nights of the history of philosophy. Some of these tales were first told in the East and some originated in the West. It is significant to note that the Eastern tales explain the Oriental side of man's being while the Western tales reveal the properties of his Occidental side.

Man is in fact the meeting point of the soul's East and the reason's West. Denying the existence of any part of his essence would impair our understanding of the significance of his being. In our effort to grasp

the meaning of the person, we should watch out not to fall into the trap of .individualism, or into that of collectivism

Even though the views expressed by Christian thinkers have helped the modern concept of the individual to crystallize, this should not be taken to mean that there exists a natural link between the two views. Just as the profound attention focused on the meaning of the person as the recipient of the Divine Word should not be credited, .in my view, to the influence of personalism

Of course, it has been said by everyone that in modern society, it is individual human beings who are the criterion and the yardstick for all institutions, laws and social relations, and that civil rights and human rights are in fact nothing other than the rights of this same individual. On the other hand, collectivism, which was launched vis-à-vis individualism, was formulated by multiplying the same concept of the individual, .and therefore the two ideologies have the same philosophical foundation

For this reason we consider, from. our position of spiritual wisdom, the antagonism between individualistic liberalism and collectivist socialism to be superficial and incidental. The concept of the person can be easily explained in terms of Islamic mysticism. The Islamic mystics consider man to be a world unto him, a microcosm. Man's originality does not emanate from his individuality or his collectivity. His originality is solely due to the fact that it is him, and him alone, who are addressed by the Divine

p: ۱۲

Call. With this address, man's soul transcends its boundaries, and with the .transcendence of his soul, his world also becomes a world of justice and humanity

Anyone who examines even briefly the meandering course of philosophy from its beginnings to the present will clearly notice

The continuous swing of the philosophers, from one extreme to the other. The last swing, the last link in the chain, is modernity. This word, which seemingly is the latest term to be derived from the Latin modernus, was apparently first used in the nineteenth century. But the Latin word itself has been in use for more than fifteen centuries, and it was only in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that modernity was applied to a wide range of concepts in such diverse fields as philosophy, art, .science, history and ethics

The common denominator in all these concepts is the cataclysm that shook the very foundations of man's existence and thinking towards the end of the Middle Ages. It was a cataclysm that pushed man and the world into a new orbit. Man and the contemporary world (so far as it is affected by man's ideas) result from this modem orbit into which they were sent in the aftermath of the Middle Ages. This new orbit was labelled 'modern' in those times, but today we call it the Renaissance. Italy played a decisive role in the birth of the Renaissance. Although many books and essays have been written to describe and explain this great milestone, there is

.still a definite need for philosophers, historians and scientists to think and talk about it

The sole aim of the Renaissance was not to revive classical Greek culture. Its principal aim was-as already pointed out by a number of thinkers-to revitalize religion by giving it a new language and fresh ideas. The Renaissance defined the man of religion not as someone who would contemptuously turn his back on the world in order to repress it, but as somebody who would face the world. The Renaissance man of religion turns to the world just as the world awaits him with open arms, and this reciprocal openness and opening up of the world and man constitutes the most fundamental point about the Renaissance, and inherently it is a religious event aimed at conserving, reforming .and propagating religion, and not opposed to it or against it

But this great event ended up, in due course, somewhere diametrically opposed to the original intention. The opening of the world was transformed into violent conquest and subjugation. This violent conquest did not remain limited to mastering nature. Its fires soon spread to human communities. What came to be known in the socio-political history of Europe, as colonialism is the result of extending the domineering attitude of man towards nature and the natural sciences, to men

Modernity without adopting a humanitarian and ethical approach. The critique of modernity that I propose is undertaken from a vantage point and angle which is profoundly different from the position of its well-known critics,

especially in the domain of philosophy. Someone who sets out to prune a tree should not cut the very branch he is standing on. That is exactly how some of the philosophers of our time are behaving in their critique of modernity.

By denying Reason any dialectical authority, they turn it either into a weapon that destroys everyone and everything, itself included, or transform it into a blunt and rusted sword that can only become a museum piece. One cannot use Reason as a critical weapon without accepting its authority and without recognizing its limits.

The critique of pure reason, which opened a new chapter in Western philosophy and may be taken to mean the critique of everything and all concepts including pure reason itself, only becomes possible if reason is endowed with authority. Without the authority of reason-which should be discussed at length and with precision in some other venue and at a more appropriate time, without forgetting to discuss its relationship to domination and power-it will not be possible to have a clear picture and concept of such vital political issues as human rights, peace, justice and freedom.

And without this clear concept, our efforts for the establishment of these ideals will

not succeed. But this should not be interpreted as a call to rationality and European style logo centrism that proceeded post-modernism. Because of the fact that Europe has given birth to modern rationality, it should feel a stronger responsibility for criticizing it and finding a solution to

.prevent its destructive consequences

Europe has itself fallen prey to its over-reliance on rationality, and is today engaged, through its thinkers and philosophers, in totally discrediting its own rationality. The Orient, which etymologically speaking has given rise to a number of words pertaining to order and a sense of direction, can undertake in, the course of a historical dialogue with the West aimed at reaching a mutual understanding, to call on Europe and America to exercise more equilibrium, serenity, and contemplation in their conduct, thus contributing to the establishment of peace, security and justice in the world. This sense of equilibrium and serenity, if it is taken in the Oriental

Age of Enlightenment was an Apollonian era, while Romanticism was the movement of the pendulum in the opposite direction. The next century should be a century for turning to the kind of spirituality that Oriental man has pursued for several thousands .of years

The exuberance and vitality of European culture stems from its critical approach towards everything, it included. But the time has come for Europe to take another step forward and view itself differently, as others see it. This should not be taken to mean that Europe should forget its great cultural heritage or that it should turn to a new type of obscurantism. It is rather an encouragement to European culture and civilization to embark on new experiences to gain a more precise knowledge of global

.cultural geography

In Orientalism, we find that the East is treated as an object of

p: ۱۶

study, rather than as 'the other side' of a dialogue. For a real dialogue among civilizations to take place, it is imperative that the East should become a real .participant in the discussions and not just remain an object of study

This is a very important step that Europe and America need to take towards the realization of the 'dialogue-among-civilizations' project. Of course this is not a one-way invitation. We too, as Iranians, as Muslims and as Asians, need to take major steps towards gaining a true knowledge of the West, as it really is. This knowledge will help us to improve our economic and social way of life. Taking such bold steps by us and by Europeans would require a character trait that was first recognized and .promoted in Europe by the Italians

Renaissance historians have written that as a result of the continuous contacts of the Italians with Byzantium and the, Islamic world, the people of Italy developed a sense of tolerance. The Italians had been familiar with Islamic civilization since the time of the Crusades, and they admired it. This knowledge and familiarity with a foreign culture, and the sense of wonder that accompanied it, was the biggest factor in .developing this sense of tolerance among the Italian people

It is ironic that this concept of tolerance that was adopted from the Muslims and is a result of the contacts made by Europeans with them, is now, in our time, being offered by Europeans to Muslims as an ethical

p: ۱۷

and political piece of advice. Evidence of the Muslim influence in the creation of this

spirit of tolerance among Europeans is clear and can be traced in Europe's literary history. A very well known play by the German dramatist Lessing entitled 'Nathan the Wise', which is itself based on an Italian work called 'One Hundred Old Tales' (Cento Novelle Antiche) is a case in point.

But the influence of Muslim thought and culture on Italian and European culture is not limited to the question of tolerance. No nation has the right to confiscate the contributions of others to its own civilization, and to deny the share of any civilization in the history of human culture. Apart from the influence of Muslim philosophy, theology and art on Europeans, something that has been very instrumental in refreshing and purifying the temper of Europeans is Islamic literature, in all its diversity and richness. As an example, one can cite the influence of Ibn al-Arabi upon Dante, but here fortunately much has been said and written by well-known European scholars.

Speaking of the historical past without any reference to the future would be an idle academic exercise, whereas it is imperative upon us, for the sake of helping human communities and improving the state of the world, to find out how the relations of Asian countries, and especially those of the Muslim countries, with Europe stand today.

Why? Because Muslims and Europeans are next-door neighbors, and nations, unlike individuals, cannot choose their neighbors. Therefore, apart

from moral, cultural and humanitarian reasons, Islam and Europe must, by force of historic and geographical circumstance, get to know one another better, and then move on to improve their political, economic and cultural relations. Our futures are inseparable because our pasts have been inseparable.

Even today, in our schools of philosophy, the views of Plato, Aristotle; and Plotinus,

and those of Descartes, Kant, Hegel and Wittgenstein from among the modernists are taught alongside the views of al-Kindi, Farabi, Ibn Sina (Avicenna), Suhrawardi and Mulla Sadra. If the great civilizations of Asia view themselves today in a Western mirror and get to know one another through the West, it was Islam that served in the not-too-distant past as a mirror to the West; it was a mirror in which the West could .see its own past and its own philosophical and cultural heritage

If dialogue is not a simple choice but a necessity for our two cultures, then this dialogue should be; conducted with the true representatives of Islamic culture and thought. Otherwise, what good will it do for the West to talk with a few 'Westoxicated' types who are themselves no more than inferior and deformed images of the West. .This would not be a dialogue; it would not even amount to a monologue

A profound, thoughtful and precise dialogue with Islamic civilization would be helpful in finding fair and practical solutions to some of the grave problems that beset the world today. The crisis of the family, the

crisis in the relationship of man and nature, the ethical crisis that has developed in scientific research, and many more problems of this nature should be among the .items on the agenda of an Islamic European dialogue

Dialogue is such a desirable thing, because it is based on freedom and free will. In a dialogue, no idea can be imposed on the other side. In a dialogue, one should respect the independent identity of the other side and his or her independent ideological and cultural integrity. Only in such a case, can dialogue be a preliminary step leading to .peace, security and justice

In the meanwhile, conducting a dialogue with Iran has its own advantages. Iran is a door-to-door neighbor with Europe on one side, and with Asia on the other. Thus Iran is the meeting point of Eastern and Western cultures, just as man is the meeting point

of the soul's East and the reason's West. The Persian heart and the Persian mind are brimful with a sense of balance, affection and tolerance, and for this reason, Iranians .are the advocates of dialogue and adherents to justice and peace

The Islamic World and Modern Challenges

point

Statement by H.E. Seyyed Muhammad Khatami, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Chairman of the Eighth Session of the Islamic Summit Conference, Tehran, ٩ .December ١٩٩٧

I wonder whether to commence my words with a statement of woes and misfortunes that are, or with the joys and delights that are to be. Is it not a fundamental objective of the

Islamic Conference to arrive at common remedies for the woes of Muslim countries, and the attainment of a stature and position befitting them? Is it not to achieve this lofty ideal that the present should be prevailed over and misfortunes remedied? No pain and affliction can be cured unless it is properly diagnosed in the first place, then the best solution is sought after with discretion and reflection, and finally, acted upon .with resolve and firmness

Our predicament is that the Islamic Ummah, once a flag-bearer of knowledge, thought, and civilization, has in recent centuries relapsed into weakness and backwardness and worse still, has even failed, due to the consequent painful state of passivity vis-à-vis the ostentatious dominant civilization of the time, to properly utilize .the fruits of this civilization

Our centuries-old passivity is the outcome of the decline of a once shining human

civilization, whose achievements and remnants are still praiseworthy and to which the dominant world civilization is truly indebted. Today, the recreation of the replica of the old civilization is neither possible, for its time is long gone, nor desirable, even if it were possible. Considering civilization as the product of man's responses to his questions about existence, the world, and himself and also as representing the sum total of his efforts in the way of meeting his needs, then what is constant in man is his .quest for knowing as well as his need and longing

However, the form and content of the questions and needs change

according to time and place. Civilizations continue to live as long as they possess the capacity to respond to the ever-renewing questions and the ever-changing needs of man, otherwise they are doomed to demise. As such, civilization, as a human affair, is .subject to birth, development, and demise

The questions and needs of man in our time are in many ways different from those of our predecessors. Our passivity in recent centuries in the face of Western civilization-which is itself a natural response to the quest of Western man-is due to the fact that for various reasons we have ceased to ask. The absence of question leads to the absence of thought, which in turn leads to inevitable passivity and subjugation vis-à-.vis others

What is important, though, is to discern that such passivity, indolence, and backwardness is not our preordained destiny. The people who once created one of the most glorious civilizations in history still enjoy the potential to create another, provided, of course, that they lend themselves to reason and reflection, and this :cannot be accomplished without the realization of the following

۱- Return, with reflection, to the historical self which on the one hand is rooted in eternal Divine inspiration and on the other, carries a unique historical and cultural

.potentiality nurtured by the past

Proper and deep understanding of the present time. In this respect, it is imperative-۲ to discern that between Islamic civilization or to be exact, civilization of Muslims-and our life today-there stands what is called 'Western civilization', a civilization

p: ۲۲

whose accomplishments are not few, and whose negative consequences, particularly .for nonWesterners' are plentiful

Our era is an era of the preponderance of Western culture and civilization, an understanding of which is imperative. However, for such an understanding to be effective and useful, it is essential to go beyond its surface and the superficialities and .to reach its theoretical basis and the fundamentals of its values

Recognition of our past is equally imperative, not in order to return and stay in the past, which is pure regression, but rather for the rediscovery of the essence of our identity and its refinement in the mentalities and habits hardened by time and place, as well as for rational criticism of the past in order to find proper support for today's honor and dignity and a platform to go beyond the present towards a future more .splendid than the past

Undoubtedly, we will only succeed in moving forward along this path if we possess the requisite fairness and capacity to utilize the positive scientific, technological, and social accomplishments of Western civilization, a stage we must inevitably go through to reach the future. Painful and bitter though we find the passivity and backwardness of Muslim countries, nevertheless the mere happy reminder that we can transform our destiny through awareness, resolve, and solidarity is a matter of elation and .delight

We can certainly move the present as well as future generations towards a new Islamic civilization through setting our eyes on horizons farther away, being together with

understanding and helping each other as brothers. For this to become a reality, all of us must put our minds to the realization of an 'Islamic civil society' in our respective .countries

The civil society which we want to promote and perfect in our society and which we recommend to other Islamic societies is fundamentally different from the 'civil society' that is rooted in Greek philosophical thinking and Roman political tradition and which, having gone through the Middle Ages, has acquired its peculiar orientation and identity in the modern world. The two, however, are not necessarily in conflict and contradiction in all their manifestations and consequences. This is exactly why we should never be oblivious to the judicious acquisition of the positive accomplishments .of Western civil society

While Western civil society, historically as well as , theoretically, is derived from the Greek city-state and the later Roman political system, the civil society we have in mind has its origin, from a historical and theoretical point of view, in Madinat ul-Nabi. Changing Yathreb to Madinatun-Nabi was not just a change of name, nor did the change from Ayyam ul-jahiliah (Days of Ignorance) to Ayyam-Ullah' (Days of Allah) represent just an alteration of designation. Madinah is not soil and territory just as .Yaum-Ullah does not stand for time

With Madinat ul-Nabi and Ayyam-Ullah there emerged in the early days of Islam a moral geography and history that ushered in the beginning of a new outlook,

character, and culture. This culture, with its unique and

p: ۲۴

distinct view of existence and man and their origin, has for centuries lived in the depths of the soul and collective memory of Muslims. Now, more than ever before, .Muslims need to take abode in their own common home

Despite the fact that ethnic, geographical, and social differences among Muslims have over time given different semblances and flavors to the Muslim individual, Madinat ul-Nabi remains as our eternal moral abode and Yaum-Ullah continues to flow as current time through all moments of our lives, or else they ought to. Madinah emerged through hegira (exodus) from the land of polytheism and oppression, as Yaum-Ullah began as the result of a break with the time of Jahiliah (darkness) and entry into the .'sacred realm of Divine 'Time and Presence

Taking abode in the 'common Islamic home' does not mean regression, rejection of scientific achievements, withdrawal from the modern world or seeking conflict with others. On the contrary, it is only after such a return to the common identity that we .can live in peace and tranquility with other peoples and nations

Living in peace and security can only be realized when one fully understands the culture and thinking but also the concerns as well as the ways and manners of others. Sophisticated understanding of the cultural and moral dimensions of other societies .and nations entails establishment of a dialogue with them

A genuine meaningful discourse can take place only when the parties concerned find themselves in their own genuine true position, otherwise the

p: ۲۵

dialogue between an alienated imitator and others is meaningless and certainly void of any good or benefit. Seeking abode in the common Islamic home, Madinatun Nabi-

is tantamount to the assumption by Muslims of their true position; that is, securing .their true Islamic identity

In the civil society that we espouse, although it is centered around the axis of Islamic thinking and culture, personal or group dictatorship or even the tyranny of the majority and elimination of the minority has no place. In such a society, man, due to the very attribute of being human, is venerated and revered and his rights respected. Citizens of an Islamic civil society enjoy the right to determine their own destiny, .supervise the governance and hold the government accountable

The government in such a society is the servant of the people and not their master, and in every eventuality, is accountable to the people whom God has entitled to determine their own destiny. Our civil society is not a society where only Muslims are entitled to rights and are considered citizens. Rather, all individuals are entitled to rights, within the framework of law and order. Defending such rights ranks among the .important fundamental duties of the government

Respect for human rights and compliance with their relevant norms and standards is not a posture adopted out of political expediency or conformity with others. Rather it is the natural consequence of our religious teachings and precepts. Amir Al-Mu'menin Imam Ali (AS) enjoined his representative to observe the principle of

p: ۲۶

justice and equity as regards all people and not Muslims. only, for 'they are of two .'groups; a group of them is your brothers in faith and the other is like you in creation

Our civil society seeks neither to dominate others nor to submit to domination. It recognizes the right of other nations to self-determination and access to the

necessary means for an honorable living. Determined not to yield to force and coercion and in its drive to stand on its own feet, our civil society, as instructed by the Holy Qur'an, considers itself entitled to acquire all requisite means for material and technical progress and authority. The rejection of domination and subservience no doubt means the rejection of force and duplicity in relations among nations, and their .replacement with logic and the principle of mutual respect in international relations

The civil society we champion is based on our collective identity whose attainment requires the continuous and ceaseless endeavors of intellectuals and thinkers. It is not a treasure that can be unearthed overnight; rather, it is a fountain of life and .morality from whose constant effusion we will benefit

Therefore, enjoyment of this treasure is gradual and is dependent on scrupulous cognizance and re-examination of our heritage as well as our doctrinal and intellectual tradition on the one hand, and sophisticated scientific and philosophical understanding of the modern world on the other. Hence, it is the thinkers and men of, learning who is pivotal in this movement and play the central

p: ۲۷

role: Our success along this path depends upon politics serving thought and virtue and .not acting as a confined and restrictive framework for them

What I have just stated is not an exercise in imagination but the panoramic outlook of a future situation, whose achievement is possible and for whose realization it is our urgent duty to strive. We are of the belief that movement along this clear path has .commenced in Iran thanks to the victory of the Islamic Revolution

The honorable people of Iran are pursuing their way with self-confidence and through perseverance in the face of difficulties and struggling against internal restrictive and regressive habits and mindsets on- the one hand, and external

pressure and conspiracies on the other. Along this path, they extend their hands, in fraternity and cooperation, to all Muslim nations and states and also to all nations and .states who are committed to the principle of mutual respect

Regaining Islamic honor and dignity, which God has discerned for us, and acquiring the requisite capabilities to claim our due share in the present world and in the creation of a new civilization, or at least, actively participating in the genesis of the civilization that will inevitably replace the existing one, we Muslims should rely on two important factors: one, wisdom and reason, and the other, cohesion and solidarity. In order to realize these two prodigious marvels can there be anything for us but ?recourse to the Holy Qur'an-the eternal heritage of the Glorious Prophet of Islam

p: ۲۸

Which Divine Book or Message more than the Qur'an has so much emphasized reasoning, meditation, reflection, contemplation, and deliberation on existence and on the world, and on learning from the fate of past peoples and communities? Furthermore, against all 'racial, ethnic, linguistic and even religious differences, the Holy Qur'an is the most trustworthy anchor of bond and unity among us Muslims, provided, of course, that we appreciate it and rely on it, with wisdom, and enlighten with its bright rays our life today as well as our future horizons, without rigidity and habitually on the one hand, and a sense of inferiority vis-à-vis others on the other .hand

At this juncture and on the occasion of this august assembly, I briefly present to the distinguished audience, with deep fraternal feeling, the priorities that Muslim countries need to address and find remedies for, on which I seek the assistance of the .conference

Towards a New and just World Order (۱

Despite the efforts of American politicians to impose their will on others, as the remaining pole of power, around whose interests the world should gravitate, international relations are in the process of transition from the previous bi-polar system to a new stage of history. In our view, a new order based on pluralism is taking shape in the world that, God willing, will not be the monopoly of any single .power

What is imperative for us Muslim countries-is that while valiantly resisting all kinds of expansionism, we should strive to secure our proper position and stature in contributing to

the shaping of the new world political order and new international relations. This .entails understanding, planning, and common endeavor

It is imperative that Muslim countries should engage in a meticulous evaluation of their position and capabilities, and upon undertaking an objective assessment of their external environment, proceed to adopt appropriate policies to arrive at political solidarity and consolidation of all 'their internal resources, and thereby strive towards ensuring effective participation in international decision making. Initially, relying on principles, common heritage and interests as well as on negotiation, we should strive to bring our views closer together in all areas and then create a chain of well-connected complementing possibilities through proper utilization of capabilities.

Security and Peace in the Region and the World (۲

Parallel to joint efforts towards fulfilling the historical mission of the Islamic world in contributing to the shaping of a new humane world order, the full-fledged cooperation of Muslim countries towards the provision and preservation of world .peace is an undeniable necessity

However, the provision of security and lasting humane peace in the world entails that

the cold-war paradigm, which was based on the necessity of the existence-for public opinion-of an actual or imagined external enemy, be cast aside. It is unfortunate though that certain expansionist tendencies in the world are seeking to create an .imaginary enemy, of Islam

It is, therefore, incumbent upon us all to strive, through effective and continual participation in the promotion of peace and security at regional and global levels, to strengthen confidence, reduce security concerns and moreover, render ineffective the wrong inculcations by

p: ۳۰

the enemies of Islam. We should be vigilant, however, about what is most threatening to our security, that is, the trend of increasing threats against the very political, cultural, and economic existence of Muslims, particularly because the extension of the range of these threats, law, pursuit of state terrorism, and development of nuclear .weapons, seriously threatens peace and security in the region

In the sensitive and strategic region of the Persian Gulf, the regional states themselves should undertake to preserve security and peace. In our view, the presence of foreign forces and armada in this sensitive area serves not only as a .source of tension and insecurity, but also has tragic environmental consequences

What are happening in the dear land of Afghanistan is indeed a massive human tragedy, as well as a fertile ground for foreign intervention and disruption of security and stability in the whole region. Muslim countries, and for that matter, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, should insist that there is no military solution .to the Afghan problem

The painful predicament in this country should be resolved, initially through negotiation with the parties involved and finally, by the Afghan people themselves. The Islamic Conference is expected to help guide this country towards peace and

.tranquility through inviting all the parties involved to engage in negotiation

The situation in Iraq, particularly in the north, is also a cause for concern. While inviting Iraq to cooperate properly with the United Nations, we believe that foreign intervention, particularly conflict and war in the

northern area that has led to the displacement of hundreds of thousands of civilians, has created the grounds for widespread insecurity in the region. We attach great importance to the territorial integrity of Iraq and declare our readiness to undertake .all humanitarian measures in this important country of the region

The dangerous designs for foreign infiltration and penetration, particularly by Israel, in various parts of our region are a serious cause for concern, underlining the necessity of vigilance on the part of all countries of the region. We welcome the active and self-assertive presence of the states of Central Asia and the Caucasus in the process of independence and development towards the honor and dignity of the .Islamic world

At this point, while welcoming the trend of peace in the friendly and fraternal nation of Tajikistan, I deem it necessary to express our gratitude to President Rahmonov and Mr. Abdullah Noori, the chairman of the National Reconciliation Commission, for their cooperation towards the Conference to exert its utmost efforts in order to prevent the spread of ethnic differences as well as to strengthen the process of peace in this .country

Some Islamic countries are currently facing foreign threats and conspiracies and are also burdened with difficulties emanating from internal differences. The Islamic Conference in general and Islamic countries in particular should declare their solemn support for the independence and interests of these countries as well as their respect

for the wishes and aspirations of Muslim nations. Moreover, the Islamic Conference should act

and move in a manner and direction that Muslims everywhere in the world, including Muslim minorities in non-Muslim countries, find in the organization a source of .confidence and assured support

In any eventuality, we should remain vigilant vis-à-vis visible as well as invisible sources of threat against our security. We believe that the Islamic countries have reached the requisite stage of maturity to undertake, through understanding and conclusion of collective agreements and treaties, to preserve their own security as well as that of the region in which they live. In this particular connection, the Islamic Republic of Iran, while emphasizing cooperation among states in the Persian Gulf region for the preservation of regional peace and stability, considers the conclusion of collective defense-security arrangements in the Persian Gulf an assured step towards the establishment of lasting security in the region and towards the defense of the .common interests and concerns of all the countries and nations concerned

Comprehensive, balanced, and Sustainable Development of Islamic Countries(۳

Development constitutes another propitious basis for the preservation of the security, stability, and independence of Islamic societies as well as for the honor and dignity of Muslim nations. In our view, proper and preferred development is comprehensive, balanced, and sustainable; it should ensure participation of all individuals, groups, and segments of society, including women and youth. In development defined as such, the human being is the central factor, whose enjoyment of the material and spiritual .blessings of life constitutes the very fundamental objective of development

In order to achieve such development, we should, first and foremost, define

p: ۳۳

and devise the proper patterns of development compatible with the particularities of our respective societies and the Islamic world. We should also acknowledge that no .country could successfully overcome all the hurdles of development on its own

Further, it is imperative that Islamic countries undertake a comprehensive, precise, and scientific assessment and evaluation of their capabilities and capacities, and help create through utilization of their respective comparative advantages-a ring of interconnected links of complementary developmental undertakings across the .Islamic world

Simultaneously, they should also properly exploit their God-given assets and resources, through efficient management and reliance on knowledge, technology, and manpower, as well as through suitable cooperation and exchange in scientific, technical, and economic fields and through exchange of specialized and skilled labor. The Islamic world will undoubtedly develop into an important pole of power, progress, and authority in the present as well as the future world through adoption and use of .these steps and measures

The existing religious bonds, spiritual affinities, and common cultural heritage among Muslim countries, once complemented with scientific, economic, political, technical, and cultural interaction and exchange, will certainly provide the requisite material and moral foundations and pillars for the establishment of a progressive, advancing and .tranquil society and will bring them collective development and security

Reassessment of the Role of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (۴

The Organization of the Islamic Conference, as the only universal multilateral organization in the Islamic world, plays an important role in the accomplishment of the aforementioned and, in general, the realization of the fundamental objectives of

'participation, dialogue, security, and development'. In

light of the steadily growing role of religion in general and Islam in particular in recent decades in explaining and shaping human relationships, Muslims all over the world are well-justified to look upon the Organization of the Islamic Conference as a refuge and source to meet their supranational Islamic and human needs and aspirations.

The Organization of the Islamic Conference, with thirty years of experience, enjoys the requisite potential resources for a more effective presence at the international level. Hence, it is natural that we now take up the question of looking for new approaches and mechanisms to strengthen its organizational structure as well as to make more efficient its decisions and ensure their implementation.

Under the present circumstances, it is incumbent upon the Organization of the Islamic Conference to assume a more active and innovative presence internationally, particularly in the resolution of current conflicts among member states or the crises imposed on them from outside.

The Organization's initiative in defending the rights of the honorable people of Bosnia stands out as a good start for a serious change in the organization's approach to international difficulties and crises. Preservation and continuation of such a sensitivity and active support of the rights and interests of Muslim societies and Muslim communities and minorities in non-member countries, along with constructive engagement in finding a solution to such chronic cases as that of Kashmir, is imperative for the institutionalization of a more pronounced role for the organization.

All of us should help the Organization of the Islamic

Conference so that it can strive, more forcefully and unequivocally, towards a sincere and compassionate resolution of differences within the Islamic world. We should also support the organization, financially as well as politically, in discharging its mandate. At the same time, more vigorous attention to the fundamental and pressing problems and issues of the Islamic world on the part of the organization, along with the enhancement of the content of its decisions;-and further reinforcement of its plans '.and activities, will certainly make the organization more energetic and dynamic

And finally, in closing, I would like to express my gratitude once again to our dear guests and wish every success for this august gathering and greater achievements .for the Organization of the t Islamic Conference

.'And let our last word be 'Praise be to Allah, the Cherisher and Sustainer of the Worlds

.'Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Creation, will be the last of our prayers'

.Was-Salamu Alaikum Wa Rahmattullah

Dialogue and the New Millennium

Text of an address delivered by President Muhammad Khatami to the annual session of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), on .۲۹ October ۱۹۹۹

It gives me great pleasure to be speaking here at UNESCO, in your presence, on a major cultural and political issue of our time. This issue is bound to have an important bearing on the life of future generations, purging it from ugly influences, while .adorning; it with morality, spirituality, and beauty

I fully recognize that excessive optimism about the immediate outcome of the proposed dialogue among

p: ۳۶

cultures and civilizations can be inhibiting and discouraging, as equally can be an exaggerated sense of pessimism under the current circumstances of the world on the one hand, and the obstacles facing the proposal on the other. Obviously, we have to be fully aware of the long, rough, and trying journey that lies ahead.

Simultaneously, we should be cognizant of the prospects for the materialization of this proposal, which would have a permanent effect on the political and epoch-making events in man's future life. The fact that this proposal has been unanimously welcomed in both international circles and specifically, in the Fifty-Third United Nations General Assembly, besides being hailed by intellectuals and the public alike, is in itself of great significance.

We certainly know that people around the world are not ready to heed any and every call they hear. There are many instances, which can be enumerated to elucidate the point. In the past, when some benevolent persons, some thinkers, or some revolutionaries either to renew their covenant or to help establish a new society on the basis of ancient human ideals invited people in some corners of the world, they did not conform. However, it was only at one particular juncture where people responded positively to this invitation: the call to dialogue among civilizations.

It stands in no doubt that the elucidation of the reasons for this event on the basis of the accepted social and political doctrines or on current philosophical views is not feasible. Based on this concept and

p: ۳۷

in the hope of finding an answer to the question as to why the proposal for the dialogue among civilizations, first presented by the 'Islamic Republic of Iran to the Fifty-Third General Assembly, was so well received, we are compelled to focus on some implicit factors prevalent in human communication, apart from political .considerations and issues of national interest

The concept of dialogue among civilizations may be interpreted in different ways and at various levels. Delving into the meaning of dialogue can be a good starting point for discussion. This will naturally lead us into the realms of philosophy and history, which will require us to separate the semantic and the philosophical aspects of dialogue. In addition, we will have to take into account the opinions of the greatest authorities on .the subject

This is not naturally the place or the time for such an exposition; however, we are impelled to briefly touch on a few points related to the term dialogue. Assuming that the philosophical and theoretical meanings of dialogue are clear, we suggest that the term in question has been both denotatively and connotatively applied. When we call .on the world to engage in dialogue, both senses are applied

Thus meetings held to discuss different questions and points of view are instances of a true dialogue, -while all cultural, artistic, scientific, and literary endeavors may be regarded as instances of a connotative mode of dialogue. This, division is not merely literary or rhetorical, because when we set out

p: ۳۸

to scrutinize the denotative meaning of dialogue, we are required to enter certain .domains where the connotative mode becomes inapplicable

The phrase 'dialogue among cultures and civilizations' embodies certain characteristics that may apparently be conflicting and even contradictory. Dialogue is as old as human culture and civilization on the one hand, and something novel on the

other–The resolution of this dichotomy should not be difficult if we are to take the phrase, on the surface, as a factual statement which would fit in as the definition of .dialogue that has endured through time

Moreover, considering the factual statement of dialogue among civilizations as an approach will require the definitions of 'culture', 'civilization', and 'man' to be framed in .such a way that they do not clash with the very essence of dialogue

This would mean our paying special attention to the collective aspect of man's existence, emphasizing the vast and infinite range of human civilization, and especially, stressing the point that no major culture or civilization has evolved in isolation. In other words, only those segments of cultures and civilizations have survived that have been endowed with the 'power of communication' which involves ."speaking' and 'listening

Therefore, dialogue among cultures and civilizations entails both speaking and listening. Listening is a virtue, which should be cultivated, and is not found easily in everyone. To acquire it one has to embark on a course of rigorous training designed to enrich one's morality and intellectual capacity. Listening is not a passive activity. It is

p: ۳۹

an active engagement where the listener is exposed to the world created, discovered, or experienced by the speaker. Without active listening, the whole dialogue is doomed .to failure

In order to understand the meaning of the phrase 'dialogue among civilizations' in a prescriptive manner, one has no choice but to pay close attention to a number of points, one of which is the relationship between a politician and an artist, the other being the relationship between ethics and politics. What kind of relationship exists ?between a great statesman and a skillful artist

The divergence between the two seems obvious because they deal with different fields of human endeavor. But what entices them to get together, and in which aspects can they be compared? If -we forego the simple aphorism that explains politics, the practice of exercising certain types of diplomatic finesse in political relations, to be an art in itself, we may then be able to safely discern a more profound .relationship between a politician and an artist

Although there are a number of definitions in the philosophy of art for this concept, and we may choose to accept any one of them, we cannot ignore the fact that an artist is a person capable of living in 'the 'present', and that he or she can also transform this present into an 'eternity'. Creating this eternity of the present for the sake of presenting the concept of the time 'when' and 'at which time', the artist is able to create a

work of art, and we, as members of the target audience, are drawn to it as the .enchanted spectators in its presence

This is regarded as the magic touch of an artist, and only great artists are capable of achieving such a status. The historical fate of an artwork is painted in perpetuity. We are also cognizant of the fact that the historical fate of nations is shaped at certain .junctures by great statesmen

I hope these words will not remind you of some old controversies, such as the argument about the influence of 'personalities' on history, because I have no intention of entering into any discussion of this sort. We can only pose such a question about the role of personalities in history when we can separate the individual aspects of man from the collective aspects of his being. Now we know that such a distinction is .arbitrary, no matter who makes it

Therefore, on the basis of the foregoing point, we may state that the common trait between statesmen and artists is nothing other than 'creativity'. When it comes to creativity, repetition and imitation are meaningless. Furthermore, the full .'manifestation of creativity in a person depends on his or her 'tenacity

A great artist tackles the artistic truth with creativity and tenacity, and a great statesman, likewise, tackles the fundamental and vital problems of his country with .the same tenacity, resoluteness, and creativity

Today politicians can take a long stride towards the creation of a better future, which are more just, more

p: ۴۱

humane, and more beautiful, for their countries and for the world by helping the .realization of the proposal for the dialogue among civilizations

Another point that I would, like to discuss here is the relationship between ethics and politics vis-à-vis dialogue among cultures. Much has been, said about the relationship of ethics and politics on a theoretical level, but what concerns us here is paying adequate attention to the ethical aspects of the proposal for a dialogue among civilizations. A basic change in political ethics is required for the realization of the proposal. Modesty, commitment, and involvement are three important ethical requisites for the crystallization of the proposal in the domains of politics and .international relations

The other significant point about the dialogue among civilizations is that the term 'dialogue' is used here in a very narrow and strict sense; it is different from such

concepts as cultural interaction, cultural interchange, and cultural domination. Many factors, including wars, may bring about cultural and scientific cooperation, or result in one culture influencing another. And similarly, the domination of one form of culture and civilization over its rivals has sometimes taken place through overt aggression, .and in our time, with the help of communication technology

But dialogue becomes possible only at a particular time and place under certain psychological, philosophical, and ethical conditions, and therefore, not everybody, with any world view and belief in some political, moral, religious or philosophical .system, can claim that he or she is an advocate of dialogue

For real dialogue

to take place, we require a set of general, all-inclusive, a priori axioms, without which no dialogue is possible in the true sense of the word. It is up to such world organizations as UNESCO to conduct research into these axioms, to publicize them, .and to make them acceptable and even desirable to the world community

These axioms and the original proposal for dialogue among civilizations are not compatible with the dogmas of positivism and modernism, and they are not in so much agreement with the extreme skepticism of the post modernists either. Therefore, one of the duties of the advocates of the theory of dialogue among cultures and civilizations is to refine the philosophical and intellectual core of the .theory

This refinement paves the way for the emancipation of the theory from any dogmatism hostile to the pursuit of truth and from the excessive cynicism afflicting post-modernist thinkers, who, heedless of the terrible pain and suffering of thousands of human beings, regard any call for the pursuit of justice and relief from

oppression as a sort of 'meta-discourse', with no philosophical justification or .explanation

Another precondition for the dialogue among civilizations is tolerance. Even though tolerance is something necessary for the early stages of the realization of the dialogue, we should be careful to distinguish between negative tolerance and positive cooperation. The former is a modern concept and the latter is a proposal put forward by Eastern religions and philosophies. For dialogue to become universally accepted as a new paradigm, it

p: ۴۳

.must be able to elevate its level from negative tolerance to positive mass cooperation

Any Muslim who is familiar with the Holy Qur'an will be reminded of the divine call to mass participation in humanitarian activities as soon as he or she hears the word 'cooperation' in the verse '...And cooperate in goodness and piety...'. All human beings are entitled to participate in the activities that will shape the world in the third millennium. No nation should be left on the sidelines because of some philosophical, political, or economic argument. It is not enough to tolerate others, but one must work .with others

The human world should be shaped by the massive cooperation of all human beings.. Though this notion up to the early twentieth century sounded like a humanist motto, .today it is a necessity for the continuation of human life

This cooperation is not merely of an economic and political nature. In order to bring the hearts of human beings closer together, we must also think of ways to bridge the gap between people's minds. One cannot be very hopeful of this prospective union of .hearts by believing in conflicting philosophical, moral, and religious foundations

To bring hearts together, it is necessary for minds to be brought closer together, and this will not be achieved unless great thinkers of the world make a special effort to understand the main concepts in the thoughts of others and then to communicate these to their own people. It is necessary to talk

p: ۴۴

about the basic concepts related to the heart and to the mind; everyone should express what they think of the meaning of life, the meaning of happiness, and the meaning of death. This may not yield any immediate results, but without it, any agreement reached merely on political and economic grounds will prove to be very .fragile and short-lived

The twentieth century, which is unparalleled in all history for the ferocity of its many wars and for its countless instances of oppression and exploitation, has been a joint product of the ideas of philosophers and the acts of statesmen. It would not be possible to put an end to the bloody and terrifying events of the century without a basic change in political thinking and also without changing the present state of international relations, replacing it with a new paradigm such as the dialogue among .cultures and civilizations

Religious faith, which is nothing other than giving an affirmative answer to the divine call from the bottom of one's heart, should not be considered as something unchangeable, and lacking dynamism. Also, our understanding and interpretation of religion should not be at odds with the spirit of faith, because such a disparity will be an obstacle in the way of dialogue among religions, which is itself the first step in the .realization of any viable peace

Just as we get our daily bread and water from the earth, we should be able to get our .daily share of fresh and lively faith from heaven

Faith should flow like a river in order to exist; there can be little hope for a stagnant swamp. Faith can only bear the fruits of morality and peace when it is constantly flowing. It is with an ever-renewing stream of faith that one can love the world and .one's fellow men

The other point as to the relationship, between peace and dialogue is that there is only one special form of peace which relates to dialogue. The so-called Pax Romana, which is also known as 'hegemonic peace', is something that requires 'power' and .'law' as its guarantors

The viability of such a peace depends on the amount of force behind it and whether the peace in question serves the interests of either party, whereas a peace attained through dialogue and the rational maturity of human beings will depend on its own raison d'être as well as on the rational and psychological development of man. As retrogression is almost impossible in rational development, such a peace will definitely be long-term, with a very broad range, covering such fields as peace among cultures, peace among religions, peace among civilizations, and also peace between .man and nature

Today, creating a lasting peace between man and nature should be a top priority. The very old relationship between man and nature, in which man loved nature, benefited from her bounty and found solace in her proximity, has been replaced simply by the exploitation and destruction of nature. In the course of thousands of years stretching from

prehistoric times to the modern era, never has man looked at nature simply as a ."source of energy

This does not mean that man has not benefited from the earth and its gifts, has not been engaged with it to develop his social and civil life, and has not been making a moderate number of changes in his natural surroundings in order to adapt himself to nature and to adapt nature to his needs. Of course he has been doing all these, but .'never before has nature been reduced to such a state of 'sheer objectiveness

In all traditions and cultures and among all the ethnic groups and nations of the world, there have existed a number of old rituals, which were performed at certain times and in certain places that coincided with natural events. But what came to be known as entzauberung or 'disenchantment' in the modern era has not only destroyed the old rituals and man's relationship with nature, but has also created a situation in which man no longer regards the world and its contents as a meaningful, purposeful, and .organic whole

Man is no longer in 'communion' with nature; the sea, the mountains, the forests and the deserts are now simply a mass of inert materials with different shapes. This rupture of intimate and ardent relations with nature has led to a weakening of similar relations among men. The dialogue among cultures and civilizations, which should be concerned with the most important and urgent problems that afflict

p: ۴۷

all mankind, should naturally place the problem of man's relations with nature at the .top of its agenda

The prescribed understanding of dialogue among cultures and civilizations will lead to a lively discussion of present-day global issues. Today, man yearns for justice, peace, freedom and security, just as he has always yearned for them. Dialogue among .civilizations needs peace to be realized, and once realized, it will help to sustain peace

In talking of dialogue as a prerequisite for peace, we mean a kind of dialogue, which is different from diplomatic negotiation. It is a well-known fact that throughout history, there have been many occasions when wars and negotiations have existed side by .side

By dialogue, we do not mean here the use of diplomatic language to promote one's political and economic interests and to bring about victory over the enemy, and in short to continue the war in another form. Dialogue among civilizations cannot take place without sympathy and affection, and without a genuine effort to understand .others without the desire to vanquish them

Some people may think that the dialogue among cultures and civilizations will eventually bring about disorder and entropy in the world. It cannot be denied that this is a possibility. But first of all, it is possible to reduce the speed and intensity of such an .eventuality to the minimum through the hope of sound education and training

Secondly, we should remember that entropy, whether we like it or not, is an inevitable problem which occurs in the

p: ۴۸

course of man's existence. The option for death and cultural degeneration and disintegration is no better than the option for life and cultural vitality. And it is an .option, which will have its share of disorder and hardship

The theory of dialogue among civilizations will not develop without conducting a comprehensive study into the roots of wars and conflicts. Such a study of conflicts cannot be undertaken in isolation and without taking into account the present state of the world. Wars often have deep psychological roots in the study of which .psychologists, social psychologists, and psychoanalysts have long been engaged

However, they break out due to political and economic factors as well. With the terrible gap between. The rich and the poor in various communities and countries of the world, how can we naively call for peace and mutual understanding? How can we call for dialogue if this inequality persists and if no fundamental steps are taken to help the deprived peoples of the world? When on the eve of the third millennium, thirty percent of the world's population will live in abject poverty, how can we talk: of ?peace and security and forget justice

Even if the West decides to save its life and forget the fate of the people in the rest of the world, it is obliged to help others in order to protect its own security. For a number of social, political and technical reasons, all the people living in today's world find themselves aboard the same

.ship

Riding out the storms and reaching the safety of the shore will be either for all the passengers or for none. This statement may sound a little exaggerated today, but tomorrow it will become easier to understand. On the threshold of the third millennium, the destiny of our world is common for all. For this destiny to be a just and happy one, the only course of action is a dialogue among various cultures and .civilizations

We should remember that although in the twentieth century the sword held sway, and some people won and others lost with each sweep of its blade, the next century should revolve around dialogue. Otherwise, this sword will reemerge as a two-edged weapon that will spare no one, and it is quite possible that the mighty warmongers will .be among its first victims

.Thank you and God bless you all

Reason and Religion

Matters such as the place of religion in our age, the role of people in shaping their destiny, the relationship between religion and modernity and religious government to liberalism, as well as the relationship between religion and democracy, are central issues for us today. If we do not attend to them, it will only be we who are absent from .the scene

A person truly living in his own time is one who understands today's world and tries to offer more innovative solutions to current problems. If we are present physically in time but absent in thought, we cannot claim to be present in our

own time. Today, friends of our revolution wish to know what models and plans this revolution offers for life, and foes hope that this revolution fails and fades from the .scene. Thus, these are pressing issues present in our time that must be addressed

Three great historical figures–Imam Khomeini, and martyrs Motahhari and Baqir as-Sadr–have played an important role in our recent history and in shaping the thinking of the current age, especially among new generations of Muslims. Their greatest achievement was their ability to transform the Muslim world culturally, especially Shiism. Imam Khomeini, who was the harbinger of new thinking and a new culture, .became the source of a great historical transformation

These three were exceptional in their knowledge and experience, and no thinker and scholar can ignore or circumvent their insights. For those without formal religious training, heeding the prescriptions of the clergy is necessary in practical matters, but in the realm of thought, no thinker can blindly follow the clergy, however outstanding they are–unless religious leaders are among the Infallibles. That is why I do not believe that great figures such as Motahhari and Sadr had the last word in religious .and intellectual matters

The point to focus on is that these were pioneers who took the first steps with confidence, and in this sense represent models for us to emulate. They are indeed worthy of tremendous respect. But their ideas must be subjected to critique. Did Motahhari and Sadr bring a new discourse to our society? I believe

that the new discourse had already begun to permeate our society before the .involvement of these figures, arising from our encounter with the West

Some rigidly traditional parts of our society completely rejected the West, while some Westernized intellectuals sought to dissolve themselves in the West. And there were reformers of religious thought in the Sunni and Shiite sects of Islam such as Seyyed Jamal-uddin Assadabadi, Sheikh Muhammad Abdeh, Iqbal Lahouri, Allameh Naeeni, and great figures such as Motahhari, Shariati and Sadr who wanted neither to dissolve into the West, nor to completely reject it, hoping instead to chart a healthy middle ground. A book by Assadabadi, for example, put forth a critique of materialism .that generated lengthy discourse in this tradition

Before the time of martyrs Motahhari and Sadr, Allameh Tabatabai in Iran and many thinkers elsewhere in the Muslim world had tried to find new answers to these types of questions. What makes Mottahari and Sadr exceptional is their attempt to defend Islamic thought from Marxist and materialist thought so as to be able to usher in a new discourse based on a deep understanding of issues. This discourse must be the .focus of all clerics and intellectuals who believe in religion and enlightenment

The question of the West's deficiencies needs more precise scrutiny. Major differences exist between our religious thought and Western values. Our thinking is based on the existence of an omnipotent, all-knowing God, while the West rejects such ,a being, at least in the sphere of running

social affairs. This A great difference between us which implies that in spiritual .matters the West has less power than we do

At present the West possesses economic, technological and scientific power, while we ,Muslims lag behind in this area. The Qur’an prescribes

Against them make ready your strength to the utmost of your power' (Holy Qur’an,' ,(۹.۶۰

in effect counseling us to attain the material sources of power as well, such that we can demand our rights on the basis of this power. It is here that I want to distinguish foundations from guidelines, for I see civilization as a foundation, not a guiding light. Civilization is built upon the specific beliefs, needs, and concerns of people. As such, a .people's beliefs may change and so may civilization

After the Prophet Muhammad, in the third and fourth Muslim centuries (eighth and ninth centuries C.E.), Muslims created a new civilization on the basis of the teachings of Islam, the Qur’an, and what they had learned from Persian and Greek civilizations. But the fact that the golden age of Islamic civilization has passed does not mean that the Qur’an and Islam have withered too. We Muslims believe that we must maintain our faith in the Qur’an and authentic Islam while searching for new answers to today's questions on the basis of religion. The products of Western civilization are everywhere; but I believe that this civilization, too, is not ultimate because it is a .human construct

All human achievements must be utilized by new

generations, j just as Western civilization borrowed heavily from the Islamic world, which in turn had been enriched in its golden age by Persian and Greek culture. My main question is, what should we Muslims do now that Western civilization is dominant and we have lost our previous civilization? If we want to be instrumental in

today's world, should we return to the West's past-which would be regressive-or do we want to transcend Western civilization, or do we merely want to dissolve into the ?West

The rigidly traditional want us to return to the past. The Westernized prescribe that we melt into the West, but those who really care about the well-being of their national and religious culture believe that we must incorporate the West to be able to transcend it, remaining aware of our own religious sources, as well as the questions and puzzles of today's world. We must adopt all of the positive achievements of the West, but see them in relation to our own heritage so we can fill in its deficiencies. .That is why we must place greater focus on the future of the West than on its past

Rectitude is one of the pillars of all religions, especially Islam, and we need a specific interpretation of the term. Unfortunately the idea of rectitude in the history of Islam has been limited to the realm of the individual, because the truly pious of the Shiite .faith have never governed society

This has also been true of the Sunnis; the

p: ۵۴

only people who were allowed to govern were the powerful, while the people were kept away from the reins of power. Social rectitude has no precedent in our history. The same Muslims who believed in rectitude committed many social injustices in the .Muslim world, and individual rectitude has not been able to overturn these inequities

Thus if we say that we possess rectitude and the West does not, we have to know exactly what we mean by rectitude. To religious believers, the relationship between

God and humans is clear, but the relationship of subjects to their rulers, individuals to their society, and various constituents of society to one another have not been scrutinized deeply enough to enable us to know the requirements of this-worldly .rectitude

Westerners believe that their culture is based on liberty. Before the advent of modern civilization, the issues of social, political, and civil liberties did not exist in the West because pre-modern Muslims and Westerners of the Middle Ages believed in salvation. Today, salvation is conceived as living free of restrictions, but in the Old World it meant freedom from internal restrictions and deficiencies such as worldly .lust

Some sects in the Islamic world went so far as saying that salvation can only come from self-denial and shunning all material objects, including even society. Farabi viewed Sufis, who prescribed such denial, as ignorant. He believed in salvation, too, but he felt that salvation can only come through immersion in a civil society guided by freedom from internal restraints and

.defects

But liberty, as conceived in the West, is the exact opposite of this because it rests on freedom from external intrusions into one's life, such that one's life is governed by no one other than one's self. The Western idea of individualism gives primacy to human understanding and desires, and a free person is one whose search for the fulfillment of needs is not hindered by anything. Of course, liberty has limits, and that is the .liberty of others

This liberty has also had positive effects as people have taken their destiny into their own hands, and government has become a servant of the people and accountable to

them, not their master. In contrast, in previous autocratic regimes, rulers were above the people and thought of them as mere pawns at the complete mercy of their rulers. But when people were freed from the shackles of this domination, they collectively .gained power over their rulers

Liberty is freedom from external bonds. In contrast, the premodern idea of salvation rested on freedom from inner bonds oblivious to social and political liberties and rights. Both of these visions are incomplete. Modern liberalism ignores internal freedom, and while it is not concerned with whether or not humans are slaves to their .passions, it requires that humans not be subjugated to the whims of their rulers

We, on the contrary, have tried to prevent people from falling prey to their desires, even though tyrants governed and enchained Muslim society. My prescription is that we

p: ۵۶

try to attain both kinds of freedom, as we refer to the Qur'an and our society. We may reject many aspects of Western liberalism, but we cannot deny its many achievements. As we discern the faults and strong points of the West, we must also .direct this form of critical thinking at ourselves

Reason can be defined in various ways, and we must specify what kind of reason we mean: Platonic, Aristotelian, neo-Platonic, the reason envisioned by Muslims and the .Sufis, the reason of Ibn-Roshd, or that of Descartes, Kant, or Hegel

In my view, reason is the common bond of all humans, a means of connecting to the world and to others, the same reason through which Plato and Aristotle communicated their views. Reason and intellect represent the only way of

understanding this world, even though this understanding is too relative to guide us to ultimate truths. Our great thinkers, while aware of the indispensability of reason, knew that reason alone could not discover all of reality. Our religious tradition claims that it is ultimately faith of the heart, not the intellect that comprehends the whole of .reality

If we think of reason and faith as contradictory and opposed to one another, because reason achieves more instrumental impact in this world, faith will be sidelined. It is important to note that the faith I am talking about exists alongside and parallel to .reason, not in opposition to it

Reason can merely take us to. the gates of the afterlife. Even though it is

p: ۵۷

aware that the world is not limited to the material, it cannot go farther than this world. It is here that faith must step in. Humans cannot do without reason in their lives as they encounter practical matters, and if they have to choose between faith and reason, they will choose the latter. Interpretations of the world based on reason are relative, a relativity that also permeates our perceptions of religion. But if our understanding of religious tradition and the Qur'an gets moribund and in need of transformation, this does not mean that tradition and the Qur'an have aged them. Our intellect is capable of adapting to the current world while also remaining attuned to tradition and the Qur'an, such that the solid essence of religion is not harmed. Our .religious thinking is bound to evolve

Humans instinctively seek God, a reality present in the direct experiential contact with the divine. Unfortunately, many of our anachronistic interpretations of religion have .assumed the veneer of sanctity and are viewed as being immutable

It is certain that humans will take further steps toward spiritual fulfillment, for a narrow and materialistic existence will inevitably torment them. We believe that religion does not oppose material well being, but invites all humans to a grander, .more exalted place than the material world

As a believer I am certain that the future belongs to religion; as an advocate of reason, I can already see the signs of the eager reception awaiting religion in today's .world

Religious Belief in Today's World

The question before

p: ۵۸

us is the condition of religion in today's world, and the calling and difficulties the religious believer faces. We may refer to all religious believers, be they Muslim, Christian, or Jewish, but in the first instance I mean we Muslims, even though this may .apply to non-Muslims who seek dignity and self-respect as well

As a Muslim who wants to live in his own time, focused on a future in which he wants to be instrumental while remaining dignified, I put forward my question regarding religion. This is a personal question in that I do not speak as an impartial and neutral person, but as an interested Muslim who is inquisitive, even though it might be necessary in some instances to look at religion from the outside so that we are not mired in prejudice and we do not descend into the abyss of ethnocentricity. So when I ask what conditions we Muslims are in, both sets of questions, both internal and .external perspectives must be clarified

We Muslims once had a dominant civilization and were shaping human history in a way that we are no longer capable of today. We want to regain our place in history, and, if possible, build a future that is different from our present and even our past, without rejecting those who are different from us, and without ignoring scientific .thought and the practical achievements of humanity

But what do I mean by 'today's world?' Briefly, I mean 'Western Civilization, which dominates the world. This means that

our economic, political, social, and cultural life is strongly influenced by the West; without its legacy and achievements, life is impossible for us Muslims. We see the effect of the West everywhere: the design and management of the city that we live in, communication technologies and much else that we use on a daily basis are all .Western creations

Today's world is Western in its orientation, techniques, and thoughts, such that even if one lives outside the geographic boundaries of the West, one must incorporate the West into one's values and life. The West has indeed brought great achievements to humanity, but it has also created great difficulties. But the key issue here is that our difficulties are more compounded than the West's because Westerners at least have a culture that is in harmony with their civilization and thus do not suffer from a .precarious identity

But our problems are compounded precisely because on the one hand the West, a civilization whose foundations we have not absorbed and internalized, directly influences our personal and social lives. On the other hand, aspects of our culture belong to a civilization whose time has passed. Even though there is no definitive, ultimate view of what culture and civilization are, in my view civilization consists of the

material aspects of social life and all institutions and organizations that act as political, .economic, industrial, and other frameworks for social organization

Culture, the way I conceive it, is the collection of rooted beliefs, as well as habits

.of thought and emotion in society

Some might see the West's crisis as being attributable to the antagonism between its motivations and human nature. We suffer from the same problem, albeit second hand. But the problem of non-Westerners is more acute because the culture that dominates our minds does not match the realities of life in this age. We suffer more .severely from these contradictions than Westerners

It is indeed possible to differentiate culture from civilization. A culture that is adapted to a civilization can remain in people's lives long after the demise of that civilization. Civilization is the basis and foundation of a culture; on the basis of its schism with culture, civilization loses its innovative and creative power, actually becoming an impediment in the way of development, for it is not deeply rooted and gradually .comes apart

One of our most central problems is that important aspects of our culture belong to a civilization whose time has long passed, and our life is influenced by modern .civilization, which requires a culture appropriate for it

As Muslims who want to hold our heads high and maintain our historical identity, ?which for us is Islam, what are we to do

Do not expect me to provide a manifesto on this, for I admit my own mental incapacity before such a grand task, and second, people's lives cannot be corrected by manifestos. One of the most powerful manifestos was that of Marx and Engels, and we saw what it led to, even though these two, especially

Marx, were brilliant and powerful thinkers and the greatest pathologists of the .capitalist order

We must confess in all sincerity that life is a collective effort, which cannot go forward except through debate, critique, and cooperation, and be recognizing the limitations and relativity of all perspectives. What we are proposing here is merely one set of possibilities, not a final and definite solution. We need more open debate and thoughtful and sincere participation in the process of serious questioning, and a more .concerted effort in finding answers. First, let us look at religion

Religion is among the oldest human institutions. Life in the absence of religious belief and resignation to a higher order is devoid of meaning. Whether they want it or not, humans have a sense of the infinite supernatural deep in their beings and grasp this .from the depths of their souls

Humans are creatures that can understand the essence and secret of being and that is why they want to uncover the nature of being-witness how many secrets have been uncovered by human efforts so far. But existence is so complex that as soon as one question is answered, many more appear soon after. Humans knowingly live in a sea of mysteries and curiosity about being, dazzled by existence and all its complexity .and intricacy

Religion is the most stable, firm, and sincere answer to people's awe before, existence. I believe that while there is a human race there will by awe, and while there

.is awe the place

of religion in the life and mind of humans is more secure than any other institution or phenomenon, for religion empowers the incomplete but curious human mind to grasp the all knowing creator. There is no one who deep in his or her heart can deny the existence of the infinite and the transcendent. But people are affected, by nihilism, ignorant of the transcendent reality , which is as harmful as the other extreme, which is thinking of transient and changing phenomena as eternal and static. Much of the .catastrophes in history have originated from these two mistakes

A Godless life, especially without the monotheistic religions and the God of Muslim mysticism or ‘Irfan-which is different from the God of the superstitious or even the God of philosophers-is dark and narrow. This is a God that is at the peak of nobility and grandeur. With all their limitations and inability, humans can make direct contact with this God and establish a sincere emotional and linguistic relationship with it. In an anxiety-ridden world replete with uncertainty, humans can get in touch with the .center of being and draw advice and direction from this source

This is a God that is magnificent and majestic. Humans are in love with it but also reverent toward it. This relationship is different from the weak's fear of the strong, similar to the anxiety of the incomplete in search of fulfillment before a being that is .complete and free of need. Reverence is the basis of rectitude

True rectitude is all reverence, and reverence is being free of the bounds of belonging to the earth. The earthly are dependent on this world, but the truly reverent see the world as being at their disposal, merely a tool for enriching the spiritual aspects of .their being

Of course, we have also had negative ‘Irfan and piety. These are all signs of the limitations and fallibility of humans that must be explored. It is evident that the believer who shuns the material world has more tranquility and gratification than those who only possess material comfort and wealth, for while the happiness of the former is eternal, the latter–food and sexual desire–are transient, and because the means of their attainment are dependent on hundreds of factors, the anxiety of losing .future pleasure kills the present pleasure

Thus in all fairness, religious belief is rooted in the depths of the human soul. And according to the Holy Qur’an, the human constitution is religious and monotheistic. The essence of religion is holy and transcendent, and if we extricate these two qualities, we will not have religion anymore. And anywhere there is holiness and transcendence, there is also absoluteness. Here I want to touch on one of the biggest .afflictions that threatens the religious life of people

The human heart is in touch with the divine and the transcendent, and whenever the human conscience achieves union with this spirit, this is itself a signal that the essence of humanity is in touch with that transcendent reality

p: ۶۴

which has been referred to as the spirit of God. But human existence has two facets: natural and Godly. Humans have their heads in the sky, but their feet on the ground, .predestined to live on this planet

And because they live on this planet, their lives and minds are in constant flux, reflecting the dynamic nature of this world. Because they are natural beings, they are unsettled. Humans are circumscribed by time and space, and thus their thinking is relative and fallible, affected by history and hence dynamic. Neither the body nor the .mind remains constant

Of course, I do not believe that all human perceptions are relative and that there are no constants in human life, but that most human constructs and all the guiding theoretical knowledge are indeed time-bound and temporary. Our knowledge is relative and constantly in flux. There is no escaping the relativity of our beliefs and knowledge, and humans have no choice but to carry on with this uncertainty and put their knowledge and skills to the test of trial and error and to modify them.

History is all about the evolution of beliefs and assumptions about the world. Has the human mind remained the same over history? All the diversity among different traditions, views, and religions, and even among the sects of the same religion is proof that no one can claim to understand all reality from all angles.

For example, when we speak of Islam, which Islam do we mean? Abu Dharr's Islam, Avicenna's Islam,

p: ۶۵

Ghazali's Islam, Ibn Arabi's Islam, the poets' Islam, ` or the Sufis' Islam? These are all indisputable aspects of history attesting to the relativity of human understanding, even of religion. Today, irrespective of creed, we differ from our parents in thought and deed.

One of the main difficulties of the community of believers is that on the one hand they take some realities to be absolute, transcendent, and holy, and on the other hand, since they are themselves relative, they see all this through the prism of the relativity of their own minds and bodies. As long as they concede their limitations and the root of this contradiction, their internal problems will not create a catastrophe.

The more acute malaise of believers appears when the absoluteness and holiness of religion affects the time- and space-bound and fallible human interpretations of religion, such that the prescriptions of a few may come to be viewed as religiosity itself. A believer is seen only as someone who subscribes to this specific view. Many

.frictions have their root here

We have religion and a shared capacity for rationality that is the tool of communication and mutual understanding among humans, and if we believe, as many philosophers do, that the human mind is governed by some absolute concepts that are valid at all times and places, let us also concede that human understanding is so limited that these relative interpretations are fallible. The wide spectrum of opinion and beliefs s among different schools and within schools is

p: ۶۶

.the most eminent proof for the veracity of this claim

Does this mean that all doors to the absolute are closed to the human mind? We know that a number of modern philosophers in the West have answered this question in the affirmative. They have either denied the existence of absolute reality or have at least proposed that we have no way of comprehending these realities, and thus many Western thinkers have reached the conclusion that at least in this-worldly social life, .religion has to be cast aside

But for the pious who believe in the omnipotence of God this can never be convincing, even though there is no way of knowing this with certainty. To call ordinary people to .a place that they cannot reach would be unwise

In my opinion, the only secure way of understanding God is through the heart, not the mind, through direct experiential contact, not the intellect. All religions have emphasized this heavily. The leaders of Islam have taught us that the intellect can be used to worship the compassionate God, not to understand it. In another place they

have suggested that the way to reach the absolute is worship, not extrapolating from .the known to the unknown

As said in the Qur’an, the way of the absolute and enlightenment is worship and good conduct, and the cleansing of the inside, meaning that the preferred way to know God .is direct experiential contact, not understanding

Of course, this in no way denies the importance of philosophical and

scientific intellect, especially in Islam, which emphasizes their important role. But' it is necessary to recognize the limitations of the intellect, and the true believer must travel the path of the heart. The truth of religious belief is an' experience, not a thought, an experience based on self-development, controlling earthly desires, and resignation before the grandeur of existence, and enchantment by the loved one. If .this path is traveled, humans will reach God

Understanding is an intellectual endeavor where through known concepts one can reach the unknown, and corresponding to the position of the person in space and time, the intellect is relative. What I have said is not new, as is evident in many religious teachings. Great mystics have all warned about the inability of the intellect, saying that the reasoning mind is based on a wooden, unstable footing. The important point is that great philosophers such as Avicenna, who had great faith in the deductive and inductive powers of the intellect, have never claimed that conceptual intellect can get us to God. The intellect, if it can go all the way, can only reach the vicinity of the .transcendent, not to the divine itself

The path of the heart is a path that leads us to truth and. righteousness. The religious experience flows from the depths of the soul. Many philosophers and mystics have tried to pinpoint the intellectual underpinnings of the religious experience, but the .path remains experiential, not intellectual

The delicate point here is that the path of

p: ۶۸

the heart, which is the sure way of getting to God, must be traveled alone; it cannot .be achieved vicariously, nor can one transmit this sort of enlightenment to others

At the same time humans are social beings who must live on the earth; such a being is in need of tools to share with others such that she can communicate with them. Language is an important agent of contact between humans, but language is an outward manifestation, a reflection of a psychological reality that exists in the human mind. Humans are capable of interpretation and transmitting their interpretations to .others through language

One can understand through the intellect that the link between intellect and enlightenment is human understanding, and this understanding is often beyond the control of humans. Human talents know no limits, and truly, the grandeur of human existence cannot be limited to material and natural things, but humans are limited in time and place, and thus have truncated vision. Humans are affected by emotions, and their enlightenment must flow from this emotionality, but since this emotionality .is relative and fallible, human interpretations cannot be absolute

Humans have signs of the superior being in them, but must use their fallible intellect that nature has bestowed on them to deal with nature. With this intellect, humans try to make sense of two separate matters: the natural and the supernatural worlds. Despite the relativity of human understanding, some believers see the absoluteness of religion as being the same as their limited and

p: ۶۹

.incomplete view of religion

But with the passage of time and transformations in human life, old interpretations do not suffice anymore. Instead of shedding their truncated vision and looking at religious issues with open-mindedness to be able to develop a more complete and dynamic view of religion, they try to impose their disjointed thinking on reality. This is .impossible in the long term and the source of much calamity in the short term

Human views of nature today are vastly different from those interpretations in the past. Some have, of course, tried to give a holy veneer to human interpretations. In Christian history, a specific interpretation of the natural world was espoused by the Catholic Church and for centuries this static view did not allow new beams to be projected onto it, and what hardships this imposed on thinkers and scientists! But this thinking was slowly transformed and today very few people, be they Muslim; Christian, or of other religions, believe that the Holy books and direct contact with God .can guide humans in understanding natural phenomena

Instead, all have accepted that to understand the world and nature we must use rationality and intellect to arrive at theories that are valid and capable of answering questions and fulfilling needs. These theories constantly await falsification, but this view is still not accepted in the human sciences. We must, of course, distinguish between theory and empirical observation, to allow for thinkers and philosophers who believe in some constant and general principles in the

.sciences

All interpretations are limited, not only regarding knowledge of the natural world, but also religion. Yet the limited nature of the human understanding of religion will not undermine religion itself, unless believers mistake their interpretations of religion for religion itself. Much friction in history has arisen out of this mistake, making people .suspicious of religion because specific interpretations change

Serving religion in this age requires that we courageously distinguish between the essence of religion and the incomplete interpretations of humans such that religion maintains its central place deep in the hearts of believers, in a way that we can modify .religious thinking to adapt to the demands of our time

Given the multiplicity of views of religion over history, we must ensure that we do not think that our view of religion is the only see to it that our reference to religious sources is guided by proper logic and clearly defined methods that are themselves in constant flux. True, these are sacred matters, but our interpretations of them are human. Only through this realization will humans open their minds to the experiences .and innovations of others

It is only in this case that commensurable with questions and needs, which are constantly being renewed, we can achieve a more instrumental and useful understanding of religion. Of course, we cannot view all religious interpretations as being equally valid, just as we cannot view lay people's interpretations of the natural .world as advanced physics or biology

Valid religious interpretation, similar to scientific thinking, requires

p: ٧١

that we be loyal to the authentic sources, which for Muslims are the Holy Qur'an and knowledge of past methods of reaching religious enlightenment. Still, all we are left with is our interpretations of religion, and the eternal life of religion is ensured by the realization that religiosity cannot be confined to any time- and space-bound interpretation. It is such a view that will open the door to the evolution of all facets of the believers' lives, without allowing misdirected thinking to inhibit thought and .development, simultaneously upholding the essence of religion

At the same time, a dynamic and instrumental view of religion depends on being intelligently present in this world, capable of handling and shaping current realities without losing our historical identity. In my view, Western civilization is the powerful reality of our age, even though the West does not seem amicable to us politically, and few are the non-Westerners who have not seen the pain of the West's political and economic oppression either in the form of the old colonialism or the hegemonic .policies of the West today

But the political-economic West is only one facet of that civilization. The whole of the West is a civilization that has its own culture, and this civilization is based on a specific world view and value system. Without understanding these values, our grasp of the West will be superficial and misleading. At the point of appraisal, we must shun the ,extremes of hating the West or being completely enchanted by it

p: ٧٢

so that on the one hand we can guard against the dangers posed by the West, and on the other hand utilize its human achievements. All this will be possible only if we reach a stage of intellectual and historical maturity to gain the capability to discern and .choose, and accept the responsibilities

Fears and Hopes

Even those opposed to our revolution's goals and ideals concede its greatness. Unprecedented conspiracies and planning against us offer ample proof that this revolution has been taken seriously, its greatness indisputable even to its enemies. The Islamic revolution has spread its momentum across the Muslim world and beyond. It has given new hope to Muslims and downtrodden peoples who seek .freedom and justice, hence affecting the world's intellectual and political climate

This sort of transformation cannot help but create friction and anxiety in the society that originated it. Thus, our society's post-revolutionary anxiety comes from the flux we are going through as we enter a new phase in our history. But this should be no

.cause for worry

At the same time, proportional to its extent and seriousness, the fears and hopes that this transformation have given rise to are great as well: fear of all that threatens the .revolution and hope for the bright, fulfilling future of revolutionary society

Thus, we expect thinkers to know not only the pillars of the revolution but also the problems that it encounters. Thinkers must focus on the relationship of the revolution to current realities in the world. Only in this way

p: ۷۳

.can we preserve all that is true and just, changing what is not

In my mind, the primary challenge confronting our revolution is the fundamental opposition or schism of its pillars with what is prevalent in today's world. The intellectual foundations and goals of our revolution are at odds with most globally dominant values, sometimes negating them altogether. This is only natural because every revolution opposes the current order, having arisen precisely for this purpose in the first place. But in our case, this opposition is particularly intense because of the .power our opponent wields in the world of ideas

The world opposed to our revolution possesses a mature, well thought-out intellectual and political system that has been centuries in the making, fine-tuned by generations of seminal scientists and thinkers. A centuries-long tradition of invention and innovation has developed into a solid socio-political system whose main ammunition is the title it has to a deeply entrenched value system. Its political and philosophical vision commands a large, global audience and capable scientists and

.experts back its system

Our opponent also commands an awesome economic, political, and military power, more diverse and complex than anything we have seen in the past. But this should not intimidate us because great revolutions have come face to face with powerful intellectual and political systems in the past and succeeded in transforming them. We who claim that our revolution is great cannot be overwhelmed by the power of the .revolution's opponents

What makes our predicament more challenging, however, is that

p: ۷۴

the West's 'intellectual, moral, and political system, as portrayed and propagated today, is attuned and adaptive to basic human nature. People are naturally drawn to .it

The champions of modern thought and civilization claim that their vision rests on 'freedom', a claim that we must take seriously especially now that socialist thought has withered with the demise of Soviet communism. This has been taken to mean .that a system based on Western notions of freedom is the only one that can endure

The opponent of the Islamic revolution relies on the principle of 'freedom' and derives much of its power from this because freedom represents a central, instinctive human goal. When freedom is depicted as allowing people to do whatever they desire, this depiction matches the strong human urge to live free of limitations. But in practice, limitless freedom is not possible, and 'freedom', the way the West defines it, is .reducible to license or being free of the encroachment of others

Thus, the yardstick here is the thought and will of humans, Champions of modern values believe that no obstacles should be placed in the way of people that would prevent them from doing whatever they desire-unless these wishes conflict with the .wishes of others

Although it must incorporate a series of human-designed restrictions, the system is in general agreeable with instinctive and basic human needs and desires, which do not have to be learned. In other words, all of the physical, worldly inclinations that the current Western order satisfies are strong

motivations in every human's life. No work or education is necessary to find these .inclinations compelling, and a system that satisfies them seems highly attractive

Our revolution, on the contrary, has called people to values whose attainment requires much will, effort, and labor. We base our system on abstinence, honesty, and rectitude, which are not inborn in human nature. And although humans have the talent to attain them, to achieve them they must labor over many difficulties and .accept that paying moral dues requires much work

Thus the opponent of our revolution, while possessing much economic, political, military, scientific, and technological power, puts forth a set of values that are agreeable with basic human needs and inclinations. This makes its system look as .though it has amoral and utopian vision, too

The West claims that it not only allows humans to be free of restrictions on their behavior and instinctive wishes, but that such a life is morally superior to all other .systems because the main goal of human life the will to freedom-is fulfilled

True, humans are attracted to nothing the way they are attracted to freedom, and they have arguably never sacrificed as much for the attainment of any goal as they have for freedom. Today, humans are offered a system that invites them to eat and .drink as they like, dress and speak as they wish, and to think freely

Simultaneously, the goal of life in such a system is prosperity and power, both viewed as serving the greatest, holiest goal of

p: ۷۶

humanity, namely freedom. The West uses the most basic and hence powerful human instincts to solidify its position. This is misleading because despite what it claims, the .West is far from achieving true freedom

We want a system based on abstinence and high morality that only comes through relentless endeavor and the courage to embark upon moral and spiritual growth. This is true freedom, but people need to be taught to see it this way. What further fans the flames of antagonism between our opponent and us today is the power and reach of .global electronic communications

In our era each person is effortlessly in contact with others in all corners of the world. The borders that separated societies in the past have vanished at the hands of new communication technologies that allow instantaneous transfer of information and .news across continents

Our opponent also controls this vital resource, possessing the complex technical knowledge to mass-disseminate images and sound waves to the world community: an uncanny skill for public relations and manufacturing consent through sights and sounds using the most refined, complex, and effective methods of science and .technology to win others over to its thoughts and lifestyle

Ours is a time when no one can blind the individual mind to what goes on in the world. Everyone everywhere is defenselessly bombarded by a barrage of information on .world events, guided by views that world powers want disseminated

Our opponent does not tolerate societies that differ from it, seeking to nip all independent movements

p: ۷۷

in the bud. The West thinks of nothing but its own interests, and if a people turn away from its values or refuse to serve its interests, it focuses all of its vast capabilities to force them to surrender or risk annihilation. And this is precisely why our revolution .has encountered waves of conspiracies and pressures from the moment it was born

We must clarify the relationship of our revolution to the difficulties it meets abroad. .But this should not make us ignore our own internal problems

One of the most important difficulties we face is the separation of Islam from the practical demands of the social and, political sphere. Now that our Islamic revolution wishes to institutionalize a new mode of individual. and social life as we encounter the world and its realities, we suffer from a void in our ability to regulate society and .human relations through Islamic ideas that work

For centuries Islamic thought has been artificially relegated to the sidelines. Islam has not been allowed to govern and regulate social relations. Instead, society's reins have either been in the hands of anti-Islamic forces or controlled by groups who have merely used Islam for self-aggrandizement, propagating it solely to legitimize their .power and rule

Real Islam, during this long hiatus, turned into a force of opposition against corrupt and obsolete systems, which ruled in its name. Today, our revolution yearns to build a system based on real Islam. Still, even our vision of real Islam encounters inadequacies when it attempts

.to address today's practical problems

We are fortunate that the relentless effort and struggle of courageous thinkers and clergy saved real Islam from falling prey to political vicissitudes by transferring .knowledge of such an Islam to new generations, never letting it perish

Islamic thought delves with unrivaled richness into matters that transcend time, space and material reality, shedding a profound light on issues above and beyond the .workaday world. Islamic mysticism or ‘Irfan is unique in the history of human thought

Compared to other systems of transcendental knowledge, ‘Irfan is the best equipped to address supernatural phenomena. But today, as we wish to put Islam into practice and apply its teachings to the material, social and political world, we encounter an intellectual void that can only be remedied if we rely on authentic Islamic sources, .principles, and rules of conduct

Our Islamic revolution's utopian visions were clearly articulated in the slogans that came to define our ideology in the early days of the revolution. These slogans either flowed directly from the minds of the people or were articulated by the aware, .enlightened leadership and subsequently embraced by the masses

Our goals may seem beyond reach at the moment. A value system is only as strong and durable as the realistic and practical affirmation of its tenets. It cannot exist in the realm of thought and imagination alone. To get to our ideal in an 'un-ideal' world, we .must achieve an appropriate balance among order, welfare, and pace in our society

If the rhythms of

p: ۷۹

our society do not meet the demands of the times we live in, it is only natural that we encounter puzzles and difficulties. It is precisely here that we need a mental breakthrough. Arriving at a practical, workable system attuned also to the demands .of the revolution must be given the highest priority

Our society's fabric is strained by vice; economic and political difficulties loom large, and we still suffer from the diluted identity of 'Westoxication'-neither ourselves, nor Western. But if the root of the problem is to be found elsewhere, and we can solve. the problem at its root, we will succeed in overcoming other difficulties more quickly, .with greater confidence and effect

In practical matters, as we have depended on theology to give order to the individual and social world, we face serious inadequacies. This can mean only that our theology must evolve to meet the demands of the revolution and also the practical needs we have today. Here we can turn to the grand leader of the revolution, Imam Khomeini, .who was a visionary Muslim leader, philosopher, theologian, and mystic

We turn to him to uncover the void and inadequacies we must overcome to achieve our goals: We must bring about the realization of the practical laws of Islam, undeterred by the deceitful West, the invasive East and their globally dominant

modes of diplomacy. For as long as theology is trapped in the books and in the clergy's .chests, there is no harm done to world devourers

And until

the clergy are active in every sphere, they will not realize that religious authority and knowledge is not enough. Centers of religious education and the clergy must be abreast of the times and have the pulse of the present in their hands and know the needs of the future. Always a few steps ahead of events, they must come up with effective responses. Our current methods of running our society are likely to change in the years ahead. And human society may come to utilize the issues facing Islam.(١)

We all agree that the Imam soared at the peak of religious mystical awareness. The yearning of the revolution for truth and justice blossomed under his leadership. Based on the Imam's thinking, a cleric who is unaware of the demands of his time, and lives with ideas that are hundreds of years old, will not be able to relieve society from today's strains, however noble his intentions might be. As well as understanding today's demands he must have the pulse, thoughts, and needs of the future in his .hands, so he can shape events instead of being at their mercy

The Imam says in another place: In Islamic government there should always be room for revision. Our revolutionary system demands that various, even opposing, viewpoints be allowed to surface. No one has the right to restrict this. It is crucial to understand the demands of society and governance such that Islamic government can make policies that benefit Muslims. Unity in method and

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١ - Ruhollah Khomeini, Sahifey-e Noor (The Book of Light), (Tehran: Markaz-e Madarek Anghlab-e Islami, ١٩٩٠), vol. ٢١, p. ١٠٠.

practice is essential. It is here that traditional religious leadership prevalent in our seminaries will not suffice.(۱)

And,

one of the greatest problems of religious leadership is the role of time and place in decision making. Government specifies a practical philosophy for dealing with sacrilege and internal and external difficulties. But these problems cannot only not be solved by a purely theoretical view of religion but will lead us to dead ends and the appearance that constitutional laws have been breached. While you must ensure that religious infractions do not happen–and I hope God doesn't bring that day–you must focus all your effort on ensuring that when encountering military, social and political issues, Islam does not seem to lack practical utility. (۲)

And on another occasion,

But on the question of the educational methods and research in religious schools, I believe in traditional theology and deem straying from it to be inappropriate. Religious leadership is proper and correct only in this way. But this does not mean that Islamic theology is not dynamic. Time and place are two determining elements.(۳)

We should not doubt that many of the views that have guided us thus far are not sufficient for managing social affairs. We must achieve a new vision and understanding. Relying on current religious leadership is necessary but not sufficient.

If this central concern is overshadowed by peripheral matters, society will be held back from achieving a desirable solution' to problems. Serious as these problems are, however, we cannot lose our hope in the future. Most

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.ibid., p. ۴۷ -۱

.ibid., p. ۶۱ -۲

.ibid., p. ۹۸ -۳

important, our young intellectuals must maintain an active and hopeful presence on the social stage.

The late Imam was an irreplaceable blessing for our revolution and the establishment of the Islamic Republic. His legacy remains a great reviver of God's religion in our time. His main difference from other religious revivers is the central leadership role he played in the establishment of Islamic government. He was aware that if religious leaders, thinkers, and intellectuals are not confronted with practical problems, they will not think of solutions. But when Islam came to the political scene, established a government, and took power into its own hands, it confronted the necessity of fulfilling the rational expectations of all people who had put their hopes in the revolution. This encounter was a great step toward the establishment of a new system of thoughts, values, and skills appropriate for our time and place, capable of addressing human needs within an Islamic framework.

The Imam's greatest legacy is indeed the establishment of Islamic government, which has managed to stand despite many pressures and conspiracies against it. The enemies may have hoped that after the Imam's passing away, the system's pillars

would unravel. But with the grace of God this did not happen. The institutionalization of leadership after the Imam and our continuing in his path of revolutionary struggle .are a source of great hope to us all

Another source of hope is the current condition of humankind in our era. Our Islamic revolution has raised a storm across the

p: ۸۳

Islamic world and among all of the worlds downtrodden. Thus the utopian yearnings and explosive power latent in the hearts of the world's dispossessed greatly buttress our revolution. If we understand this force and use it effectively, we will be able to confront the opponent despite its economic, military, and political predominance. If we rely on the utopian visions that our revolution has awakened throughout the Islamic world and beyond, and believe that backers of our revolution are ready to sacrifice for it, victory is within our reach. What adds further hope to our future is that our opponent-despite all its apparent might-has become old and is approaching the end of its line. The existence of crisis in the thought and civilization of the West .betrays its senility

Again, our main problem is the fundamental opposition of the values of our revolution to what is dominant in the world on the one hand, and our lack of practical experience in installing a real religious government on the other. What must we do to solve this problem so that with the help of God we can ensure that this revolution remains ?immune to serious threats

The unsophisticated among us may opt for the simplistic option of censorship and preventing the values and thoughts of our opponent from reaching and subverting ?our people. But is this a viable solution

The low capacity and truncated vision of some may lead them to attack all that does not fit into their closed minds and match their tastes

as being against Islam, the revolution, and the legacy of the revolution's martyrs. Unfortunately, there are camps in our society, which although bereft of proper logic, think of themselves as the pillars of the revolution and Islam, and accuse their opponents of being against Islam and the revolution, as they try to oust their opponents from the political ring at any cost.

But what exactly is the yardstick for judging what is acceptable and what is not? In opposing difficulties and the enemy, what strategy should we adopt? Will our cultural policy be one of censorship and restricting access to all sources we disagree with? Can a policy of isolation from the international community succeed in today's world?

Throughout its glorious history, Islam has never accepted isolation and restricting access as a viable policy. In certain periods this has been imposed on people in the name of Islam, causing irreparable damage, but it has not lasted. Islam has embraced opposing views with open arms. Seminal Muslim thinkers have actively sought the encounter of other views. This openness has imbued Islamic civilization with much intellectual weight.

At the same time restriction is not practical in today's world. Information channels accessible to our people are not limited to government-run sources. Let us assume that we prevent all faulty prose from being published, stop all newspapers or magazines from printing the smallest bit that offends our tastes, or disallow the production of any films that we find defective. Will these thoughts and views that have been

?officially banned find no other channel for reaching our people

In judging what is good and bad in the world of ideas, rigid fixations and dogma may replace strong logic and realistic appraisals -much to our detriment. ft is naive to think that government-run channels are people's only source of access to international and .inter-societal communication

Today, the global broadcast of mass-communicated electronic images is under no .government's control

How can we prevent dynamic and curious minds from accessing what they desire? How can we build a wall between such minds and the outside world? With the rapid advance of communication technology that is becoming accessible to ever-larger segments of our population, controlling the spread of images will only be more .unrealistic and impractical in the future

Of course this does not mean that our Islamic system should impose no limitations and restrictions on people's access to information. That would be unrealistic as well. No form of governance can exist without imposing some restrictions, and even the .most developed liberal democracies are not exempt from this rule

But there is a difference between a system that relies on restriction as its main strategy and a system that uses restriction occasionally to deal tactically with sensitive and vital matters. Any system is bound to impose some form of restriction when its whole existence and the fundamentals of its rule are endangered. However, .on the whole Islam historically has not based its system on restriction and censorship

The cultural strategy of a dynamic and vibrant Islamic

p: ۸۶

society cannot be isolation. As a progressive religion, Islam shuns building fences around people's consciousness. Instead, our strategy must focus on making our people immune, raising and educating them to resist the cultural onslaught of the West on their own. Only a strategy of immunization represents a viable solution for .today and tomorrow

This requires us to allow various disparate views to engage one another in our society. How is it possible to make the body immune without injecting it with a controlled and weakened virus, so that it can resist the more extensive and threatening invasion of that virus? The way to make the body resistant to viruses is certainly not by preventing any viruses from coming near it. Instead we must see to it that the living organism has the apparatus to resist the virus itself. In society, too, it .cannot be any other way

An active, evolving society must be in contact and communication with different, sometimes opposing, views to be able to equip itself with a more powerful, attractive, and effective thought than that of the opponent. And if the sources of revolutionary and religious thought really wish to preserve the revolutionary system, they have no .other choice but to offer society sophisticated and adaptive thinking

At the outset of the revolution, the Imam (Khomeini) counseled against shutting out what we found undesirable. And we are proud that our revolution took its first steps on the basis of liberty. This was not an unintended consequence of the

p: ۸۷

revolution, out of our leaders' hands. The principle from the beginning was that others can speak their minds, unless they are engaging in conspiracy. If there were groups who did not want to use this freedom wisely and fairly, abusing and subverting it .instead, they were the ones at fault, not the revolution

Society suffered great harm as a result of their unseemly actions. It was the abusers of liberty who did not uphold the supremacy of thought and rationality as they tried to pollute the atmosphere of openness and use it to impose their autocratic wishes. They did not realize that a government held up by the will and belief of a people and watered by the blood of martyrs and the effort of millions of selfless devotees will stand firm against conspiracy. The limit of legal opposition was conspiracy then and it .must be the same today

The idea of what exactly constitutes conspiracy must be clarified as well. We must look at social problems with a comprehensive and open view. Otherwise any closed-minded and dogmatic person can use the excuse of conspiracy to oust her opponents .from the political stage. Our system needs accountability and discipline

Reckless and superficial but politically charged ideas of certain groups can neither determine society's best interests nor understand conspiracy and its limits. Otherwise, anyone can mount an attack on thoughts different from his own limited tastes with the excuse of defending the interests of the country, the revolution, and .religion against conspiracy

Thus, to

p: ۸۸

solve our fundamental problems, we should build and offer superior thinking and logic, as well as more attractive solutions to society's woes. Only in this way can we give hope to the revolution's devotees, adding to their material and spiritual well being. We must endeavor to build a system so solidly grounded that it can not only resist unraveling at the encounter of other systems, but can display its vigor and superiority. This impetus to self-affirmation has protected and enriched Islamic

.thought and the essence of religious belief over the ages

A system like ours, based as it is on Islamic utopian ideology, is bound to restrict some individual liberties. A revolutionary religious system will naturally forbid much that is accessible to people-particularly the youth-in the West. The overflowing urges of the youth are better satisfied in the West, and hedonistic instincts are fulfilled to a greater degree; whereas in an Islamic system, a multitude of religious rules stand in the way. To make our society stable and strong, we must teach the young a more worthy path .than hedonism, such that they gain pleasure out of abstinence

Utopian visions can keep people, especially the youth, confident and lively. Muslim youths must believe that alongside the limitations and restrictions that our system has imposed, it has given them character, imbuing their lives with a direction in whose shadow they feel pride, greatness and tranquility. Emotional and mental needs must be addressed for people to feel content. If the Islam we offer fails

.to accomplish this, the foundations of our society will be unstable

Fulfilling the utopian vision of the revolution's devotees inside and outside Iran is a pressing necessity to ensure our survival. To assert our identity it is necessary to be present in all world forums and to defend Islam and Iran effectively in all international tribunals and conventions. But we cannot ultimately flourish and make our weight felt in the international scene whose rules are set by our opponents-unless we maintain .our unique idealism

Why was it that we had less pressing cultural problems during the eight-year war with Iraq? Because a massive wave of revolutionary youths was at the front lines and

people saw themselves as, defenders of the revolution and the country. This active presence filled people with deep pride,. Our youth felt that their lives had assumed new meaning, and that they had achieved spiritual growth with which they could .stand against oppressors and tyrants

Now that the war is over, what must replace it? The only effective solution is preparing the ground for the active involvement of the young generation in all areas where their talents can develop and be put to productive use. If the young generation .does not feel active and instrumental in society, it is natural that they feel dejected

To make society vigorous, thinkers must see in Islam a system of superior logic and ingenious solutions. At the same time, all social forces must be active in the social and political process. Here the

p: ۹۰

greatest mission of intellectuals is to understand the real Islam, the kind that our .revolution drew from to succeed

We live in a world that in many ways is at odds with our Islamic revolution's orientation, and we want to organize our lives on the basis of Islam. It is necessary to find out exactly what sort of Islam we want to base our lives on: Here it is incumbent upon our seminaries and universities to answer this question. It is not as though there is no divergence of opinion on what Islam is. Over the past century, if not all of Islamic history, three separate Islam. To decide what sort of Islam we want, we must stay clear of factional squabbles such that we can chart our future path on the basis of the .right sort of Islam

Traditionally, we have encountered a regressive, a diluted, and a real Islam. Which of

these three was our revolution based on, and which one can save our society and bring honor and pride to it? We believe that the basis of our revolution is the real Islam, the same Islam that has its roots in revelation and solid monotheistic perspectives-an Islam that believes in the inherent dignity of humans and wants enlightened happiness for humanity, a constantly evolving Islam that can find solutions to new puzzles as they emerge. All throughout history, this interpretation of Islam has defended itself against sacrilege and corruption, but it has never been given the opportunity to assert

.itself in the socio-political sphere

It is imprudent to assume that since our revolution has succeeded and an Islamic Republic established, the victory of real Islam will be assured automatically. No, we face serious difficulties and dangers. But in the first instance, the devotees of real Islam must equip themselves with rationality, thought, and logic more than ever before. The battle of ideas is far more fateful and determining than political and military conflict. First, we have to see which Islam we have accepted and why. Only then will we muster sufficient moral and intellectual weight to confront our opponents. The experience of our revolution has taught us invaluable lessons that we cannot .forget

From the first days that the Imam (Khomeini) took center stage, he began his religiously inspired struggle against tyranny, dependency, corruption, cultural degradation, and American imperialism. Within the ranks of the educated and senior clergy, there were those who opposed the Imam's method of struggle and his interpretation of Islam. Some were sympathizers of the monarchy; others were .driven by profit-seeking and self-serving motives

Most such people were not traitors but had an interpretation of Islam that did not suit the revolution. There were others who supported the Imam in the initial steps but .backed away from supporting him when matters got more serious

Many of those devoted to the Imam had endured imprisonment and exile to see the revolution through. These were and are good, dedicated people, but subsequently, when the time came to institutionalize the revolution; their

p: ۹۲

.view of Islam strayed from the Imam's

In many cases after the revolution, when the issue of social justice and combating inequality was voiced, some screamed that Islam was in danger. I am not saying that all those who used the slogans of social justice and the fight against inequality were .on the right path

The issue here is the principle of social justice itself, and that there were those who did not even want to bring it up, resisting all practical steps that we wanted to take to ameliorate the problem. Such people could not tolerate the fact that the Imam's Islam wanted social justice, and thus subverted all efforts in this direction. The Imam was compelled to confront this thinking bluntly, stating that on the basis of the Islam he had introduced, achieving social justice was among the primary goals of the .revolution

There were those who felt that the place of women was in the home, arguing that the presence of women in the workplace leads to corruption and moral decay. They were against higher education for women, and opposed women's involvement in social affairs, This was another view that was introduced under the guise of Islam. At the end of the first elected Majles (Parliament) after the revolution, a few influential circles tried to convince the Imam that women should not be allowed to run for seats .in the Majles

The Imam confronted this thinking resolutely and` defended women's right to take part in the elections. There were

those who claimed that no one other than the clergy should be allowed to take part in politics. They were especially suspicious of university students and academics, labeling them 'deviant' just because they carried intellectual weight. They forbade a large part of society from being involved in their own political destiny. They would try to justify all this in the name of Islam. Once again, the Imam responded swiftly, .scolding their regressive, prescriptions

Some criticized all social and cultural programs to the point of forcing the Imam to outline explicitly the benefits of cultural activities to dispel any doubts. Others were opposed to all music, film, and theater. They were not against only some forms of art, but all artistic expression in general. Some even opposed broadcasting sporting events on television and thought it sinful. The Imam confronted all these restrictive and regressive religious views head-on, claiming that much of what they objected to was actually beneficial to society. In the last years of his prolific life, the Imam put :forth the most penetrating critique of religious dogma

We must endeavor to break the chains of ignorance and superstition to reach the prophet's fresh fountain. Today the most puzzling thing to people is this Islam, and its rescue requires sacrifice; pray that I am myself one of these sacrifices.(۱)

All who truly believe in the revolution and wish to dignify Islam will choose the Islam articulated by the Imam. This should not be taken to mean that others do not have the right

.ibid., p. ۴۱ -۱

to publicly express their views. Everyone is entitled to voice his opinion within the law and the bounds of rationality. However, we must know which interpretation of Islam our revolution is based on. Do the groups that our Imam numerously scolded have the right to impose their extreme views on the people and to portray their opponents as ?being against Islam and the revolution

Regressive and dogmatic clerics, those whom the Imam singled out as the greatest danger to the revolution, are not sitting idly by. The enlightened and truly devoted .must be mindful of the danger they pose and guard against it

Alongside the regressive version of Islam, we have the camp that believes in a diluted Islam, a fabricated, inauthentic form of the faith that merely goes through the motions of piety without any real knowledge of Islam or real belief in its teachings. Their Islam has so many foreign, imported elements that it cannot be called Islam at all. Diluted Islam represents one of the most dangerous pores for the West's cultural onslaught. Un-Islamic or anti-Islamic political currents have never enjoyed a popular base and they have never been viewed as the main danger. But those who have had the appearance of piety and have been active in society with ideas borrowed from the .West or others have been able to propagate their views in parts of society

Opposed to these regressive and diluted views of Islam, we must recognize the real Islam, and the secret of our survival and

success is the understanding and implementation of this kind of Islam, in whose shadow we can pass safely through dangers that threaten the existence and health of the revolution and our society. This is the same Islam that the late Imam epitomized, and for which a great mind like Motahhari(١) was martyred. We must discover the target of the Imam's pronouncements, particularly in the last years of his life. A bit of focus will show that the Imam's criticism was directed at those views of Islam that hinder progress and development, paralyzing the search for solutions to .difficulties that face our society

If diluted Islam martyred Motahhari, then regressive Islam has tried to negate the .substance of his thought

The confrontations that have been directed at the likes of Motahhari and Beheshti(٢) in our society are alarming and serious. And we even witnessed how unseemly this .current was to Hashemi-Rafsanjani(٣) when he brought up the issue of social justice

To know the real Islam and to base our society upon it, our greatest source of inspiration is the religious and devoted youth in our seminaries and universities. Aided by the knowledge and piety of eminent clergy, we must breed a new cadre of religious intellectuals who are up-to-date and enlightened, and we must tirelessly march toward understanding the specific vision of Islam that is the basis of our revolution. It is understanding and explaining this Islam that will make us immune to other schools .of thought

Observations on the Information World

Much has

Translator's Note: Murtad'a Motahhari (۱۹۱۹-۱۹۷۹). Iranian thinker and cleric who - ۱ was instrumental in reconciling traditional seminaries with universities. His writings made traditional Islamic concepts and the relationship between Iran and Islam accessible to his contemporaries. He was assassinated by armed opponents of the .Islamic Republic a few months after the revolution

Translator's Note: Muhammad Hosseini-Beheshti (۱۹۲۱-۱۹۸۰). A cleric and leading - ۲ ideologue of Iran's Islamic revolution who was' assassinated along with scores of other political figures when a bomb exploded in the headquarters of the Islamic .Republican Party

Translator's Note: Ali-Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani (b.۱۹۳۳). A cleric and political - ۳ leader in the Islamic Republic of who has served in a number of senior posts .culminating to his tenure as President of the Islamic Republic of Iran from ۱۹۸۹ to ۱۹۹۷

been said in our era about the central role of information in shaping human destiny, making it possible even to claim that information has surpassed military and political might as the main source of power in today's world. All peoples who seek pride, power and progress must learn to manage this vital resource, staying abreast of constantly .evolving communication technologies

Timely access to information and effective means of disseminating it are central to the development process in every country. We cannot afford to fall farther behind in this rapidly advancing' field and must cooperate to produce, store and disseminate .information effectively. This is no easy feat

Most inquiry into the information world focuses exclusively on its technical underpinnings at the expense of exploring its human, political dimension. This task is .crucial to our destiny

In its contemporary, complex forms, information technology represents one of the highest achievements of modern culture, which uses its control over information to solidify its domination of the world. Thus, inquiry into the nature of the information world is inseparable from uncovering the nature of modern civilization itself. Until we address this important question, we will not be able to muster the confidence and wisdom to understand our relationship to modern civilization. Otherwise, we will live in a world whose rules have been set by others, at the mercy of circumstance, not as .masters of our fate

We confront the Western-dominated information world on two mystical yearnings of .humans

Of course, our concerns with the limitations of science do not imply

p: ۹۷

that we must return to the Middle Ages. Nor can we regress to the limited and backward views of religion and spirituality prevalent in those times. Modern humans need new interpretations of spirituality and supernatural phenomena to imbue their lives with meaning. Because of the central place of science and technology in Western .civilization, uncertainty about their meaning has led to a general crisis in the West

This crisis is more acutely felt in the human sciences than in the physical or natural sciences. Modern civilization is more deeply tied to political, cultural, and economic ideas than to the natural sciences. In the human sciences, the subject and object of study are the same, as humans study themselves, their societies, and their political systems. Inquiry is based on the motives and assumptions of the agent or the scientist, not on objective reality. The identity crisis of the scientific community .naturally will permeate the cultural and political sphere

The flood of information in our age saturates the senses of all humanity so extensively that the ability to assess and choose is impaired even among Westerners who are producers of information, let alone us who have played a peripheral role in the information world. Electronic information is the brainchild of modern civilization. Thus the power of today's information-based mass culture is tied to the legitimacy of the values of Western civilization for which the information revolution counts as the .most prominent achievement

.For those of us outside the West, the information world poses manifold challenges

p: ۹۸

Today, advanced industrial countries use information as the main tool to safeguard their own economic and political interests, even if they are irreconcilable with the interests of the majority of the world's peoples who live outside the sphere of modern .civilization

Thus, however optimistic some might feel about the benefits of the information revolution for all humanity, we cannot doubt that politically and culturally loaded information is manufactured to protect the interests of industrialized powers while .appropriating the rights of deprived and subjugated peoples

As consumers of such information we cannot ignore that the political will behind information production and dissemination is based on maintaining Western supremacy. Non-Westerners are taught to respect Western supremacy as legitimate, even desirable. Western civilization has used and continues to use all its resources to dominate the minds and lives of all peoples through controlling the sources of .information and the means of communication

This does not mean that we must isolate ourselves from the Western-dominated information world. Such a thing is undesirable and practically impossible as the global

reach of information constantly expands. Awareness of today's world events is an imperative for understanding our place in the world and planning our future in it. Being isolated from the world's information networks can only turn us into pawns of .others because it is they who control the flow of this vital and strategic resource

We must reach a level of historical evolution and social maturity to be able to judge accurately the thoughts and efforts of others so

p: ٩٩

that we know our place in the world and can put our own house in order. This way we can choose what benefits us' in the new world and reject all that does not. We must .become active on three fronts

First, we must understand the peculiarities of our era and treat Western civilization as our era's ultimate manifestation and symbol. This means understanding the values and tenets of Western civilization and freeing ourselves from the equally, harmful .extremes of either hating it or being completely taken in and entranced by it

Second, we must try to come to grips with our own historical identity that has brought many valuable gifts to humanity but has also encountered many difficulties and inadequacies. And third, while we must pay attention to problems that threaten our society from the outside-the hegemonic nature of Western politics, economics, and .culture-we must also focus on our own internal problems and frictions

Many of our traditions are human constructs that, however great they might have been in their own time, belong to a different historical epoch and place but have nonetheless maintained the veneer of sanctity and infallibility. Today, dogmatic attachment to archaic ideas poses a serious obstacle to our society, preventing it

from utilizing the human achievements and thoughts of our era. Let us not forget that not just the natural world, but religion also must be scrutinized by reflection, for our .interpretation of religion is constantly being modified as well

Our attachment to the past should not mean

p: ١٠٠

negating all the achievements of modern, Western civilization. We will not return to the past to stay there, but merely to understand and regain our identity that has been rendered fragile by the onslaught of Western culture. With knowledge and will, we can shape the future, which beckons the cooperation and coordination of all devotees and thinkers of the Muslim world. We Muslims have a grand historical legacy that we .must revive in today's world

Despite disagreements among sects within the Islamic world, the unity and coordination of Islamic thought across various parts of the Islamic world has been phenomenal. Over centuries of Islamic history, Andalusia theologians preached in Damascus and Baghdad, just as Persian philosophers and mathematicians felt at home in Africa and Mesopotamia. We Muslims possess the foundations for a solid .unity that can create a powerful cultural movement in the future

First, we possess a common historical bond and system of values that Islam, as the source of a great civilization, has provided us. Although this civilization is no longer globally dominant as it once was, it represents the greatest source of shared. Experience among all Muslims. Our attachment to the theism of Islam, based on a .belief in the unity of God, is the linchpin of the bond that ties all Muslims together

Second, the increasing awareness of all peoples, especially in this century, has instilled a sense of unity of purpose among Muslims as we all perceive ourselves as the victims of colonialism in its various forms. There

is no one among us who has not seen his dignity, freedom, and independence violated by colonial powers. We all wish independence and freedom from the shackles of this domination. If we combine our common pain and unify our visions and beliefs, we will sow the seeds of betterment and prosperity in our societies. Sharing and coordinating .our information resources represents the hallmark of this cooperation

The Islamic Republic of Iran, despite its many differences with the globally dominant political order, has always championed deep cultural and scientific ties. among Muslims of all countries. And today also, we believe that despite political differences, the conditions must be created for the scientists and thinkers of the whole Muslim world to work together. All Muslims must firmly join hands to further the cause of .development in their societies

Tradition, Modernity and Development

Thinking about the meaning of the above three concepts and discerning the relationship among them is one of the most pressing preoccupations of thinkers in our age, especially in non-Western countries. A superficial glance at the above terms may lead us to conclude prematurely that modernity is a Western phenomenon, built .through the dismantling and breaking of tradition

Then there is development, viewed as the upshot of modernity, which has become a paramount strategic goal of those outside the stem sphere of thought and values. From such assumptions we can reach the simplistic conclusion that to reach development, it is necessary to embark on modernization, and modernization can .only come about through dismantling tradition

But

p: ۱۰۲

these arbitrary assumptions can only satisfy the feebleminded or those who feel no responsibility for human destiny. The problem is much too complex to be solved with simplistic solutions. Tradition cannot be transformed through mere prescriptions, nor does modernization come about easily, for, until people themselves change, no fateful transformation will happen in their lives, and the transformation of people is a highly complex affair for which individuals often lack the tools.

Terms such as tradition, modernization, and development are replete with ambiguity, and thus far there is no consensus on how to define them. Indeed, consensus may never emerge. In order to minimize misunderstanding, all those engaged in this debate must specify clearly what they mean by these terms before they leap to offer their theories and prescriptions.

What do I understand modernization and tradition to mean?

When we talk about modernity, we are certainly talking about innovative and evolving phenomena and institutions. But are all new phenomena modern? Or does modernity mark a specific era in history? Human society, even its most primitive kinds in antiquity, has always been in flux.

The essential difference between the Old World and the modern era is not in the static nature of the old versus the dynamism of the modern, but in the slow pace of change in the Old World and the breathtaking pace of change in modernity.

Putting the intricate debate about the relationship between civilization and culture aside for the moment, it is fair to assume that each culture is attuned

and adapted to a specific civilization. Modern civilization came about through the dismantling of the previous civilization and through overturning the culture corresponding to the old civilization. Then modern civilization ushered in a culture to fit and meet its demands.

Tradition, by definition, deals with the past, but we cannot think of all old things as denoting tradition. We talk about divine traditions or natural traditions, which are considered constant and immutable by their proponents.

The laws governing existence are divine or natural traditions. It is possible that humans commit errors in the discovery of these laws, and later come to recognize their errors, but what changes here is the understanding of the laws, not the laws themselves. We may accept the principle of change and instability in the essence of the world, just as Sadral Mote'allehin among the great Muslim philosophers-believes in 'dynamic essences', or just as Marxists see the world as being propelled by internal contradictions, and thus immersed in a constant state of transformation. Thus, the principle of change is permanent for everything.

In my view, tradition is a human affair pertaining to the mental and emotional predispositions of a people; in other words, tradition comprises the habituated thoughts, beliefs, and deeds of a people, that have been institutionalized in society on the basis of past practices.

In this definition, tradition is similar to culture, and in many instances tradition is itself a symbol of culture, but we cannot think of all culture as being traditional. Tradition is the existing

culture in a society that has once possessed a compatible civilization. But now, even though the old civilization has withered, aspects of the corresponding culture have remained deeply entrenched. By civilization I do not refer only to advanced and complex civilizations, but to a specific way of life broadly defined. Thus hunter-gatherers, too, had a civilization; indeed, for as long as human society has existed, .there has been civilization

The existence of a past culture in the present while the base civilization has withered is possible because culture has roots in the depths of human beings and may be more long lasting than the underlying civilization. Many cultural legacies may outlast civilizations by centuries.- In other words, tradition is the reflection of past culture in .today's life if the civilization has changed

When. a new civilization is created and the culture appropriate for it is entrenched, people who still carry around vestiges of the previous culture experience a contradiction when encountering a new civilization. On the one hand, the realities of life are affected by modern civilization, but much that contradicts modern civilization is still in place, too. People and nations like us are deeply affected by this contradiction. Most of the cultural uncertainties in our society, which has vast differences with the West, are attributable to this contradiction, which until solved at the root, will continue .to spawn crisis

Western society's embracing modern civilization came about through breaking with tradition. The beginning of modern civilization should be seen as the point when

the thoughts and values of the Catholic Church and the social and economic traditions of feudalism were questioned and then rejected. The victor in this challenge was modern civilization and the leaders of this value system. The fundamentals of this system were exported to America from Europe and from these two places to distant .comers of the world and became dominant, even affecting life in our country

At the same time, our past culture continues to live within us; this culture has serious differences and disagreements with Western culture. In other words, our tradition is more suitable for another civilization. That civilization no longer exists and the present .civilization's border has expanded and affected us fundamentally

As we all know, this civilization established itself by dismantling the civilization of the Middle Ages in the West. But we had a different civilization from the West in the Middle Ages. Thus, even though modern civilization was at odds with the Western civilization of the Middle Ages, does this mean that the same schism exists between modernity and our previous civilization? This may have something to do with the .difference between Islamic and Christian civilizations and cultures

The most important similarity of our thought today to what was dominant in the West in the Middle Ages is the central place accorded to God in the lives of humans. By contrast, in modern civilization secular humans are viewed as being the center. Even the chief architects of modern thinking-such as Descartes who emerged at the dawn of

the modern era-who have defended God and the supernatural in principle, have a markedly different view than Christians and Muslims of the Middle Ages. The .centrality of the role of humans constitutes the chief difference among them

Of course, there has always been divine, mystical, and religious thinking in the West. But there is no doubt that as God and religion were central to the Middle Ages, nature and humans are central to the modern world. In the Middle Ages, otherworldly issues carried more weight and prestige, and here Muslims and Christians were similar. But .in today's world, focus on the afterlife has been replaced by secular concerns

In the modern world, even though the boundless optimism of eighteenth-century Westerners has faded, science and its offspring technology are still the most important factors guiding human life. People-at least in social spheres-do not see any .reason to rely on anything other than empirical science and human perceptions

In the past, the view of humans from the perspectives of being and science was different from today's. The value of knowledge was not measured by its utility in the practical affairs of this world, but by the nobility and exalted place of its subject matter. Thus, inquiry into metaphysics, and especially theology, were viewed as being .the most important branches of knowledge

In social life, it was claimed that religious law, or the apparent meaning discerned from religious texts, should rule supreme. Besides divine 'revelation', humanity did not need another source for knowledge and practice. It

p: ۱۰۷

is worth mentioning that in the Muslim world, philosophy under the influence of Aristotelian and neo-Platonic views-which was essentially different from modern philosophy and rationality-was faced with statutory and canonical views of religion among the rulers and the population, and the effect of Sufism among much of the elite and some parts of society, and thus remained isolated and confined to the .sidelines

The beginning of the modern age can be seen as a time when the main measure of the significance of knowledge and science became their practical utility in this world, whereas before then, the dominant thinking had rested on the folly of the physical world. And even though Muslims of that time were ahead of their Christian contemporaries in recognizing the validity-and indeed the significance-of the natural and physical world, in both civilizations, focusing on the natural world was viewed as .being a largely futile occupation

The crux of my argument is that today's civilization dominates us non-Westerners as well, and that this civilization requires a culture that is attuned to it. Yet portions of our culture remain attuned to a bygone civilization. Modern civilization was built through .the dismantling of the previous civilization and the accompanying culture

Thus we must concede that the incompatibility of modern civilization with our tradition-bound civilization is one of the most important causes of the crisis in our society. What is to be done? Should we insist on remaining immersed in our tradition, or should we melt fully into Western civilization? Or is there

p: ۱۰۸

another way of removing this contradiction, or at least taming and channeling it such that it does not lead to our destruction and the unraveling of our social fabric and ?historical identity

Many traditionalists continue to defend their heritage against modernity, often thinking of this heritage as being divine, assuming that they can bring order to their lives by shutting the doors to Western values and civilization, and by relying on .tradition

But this ill-fated rigidity has not achieved their aims, a fact evident in Western civilization's success in exporting much of its values to unprepared tradition-bound

societies that have lacked the capability to understand the West. Thus, traditionalists have been left with no choice but to retreat progressively, without providing society with the tools to appraise Western civilization properly.

Then there are those who believe that this crisis can be solved by a complete and uncritical adopting of modern values. Modernity, to them, counts as the highest achievement of humankind to date, as they prescribe that all obstacles for its embrace be removed, tradition being viewed as the biggest obstacle in the process of modernization.

They advise that we prepare the way for the new civilization by stepping on our past heritage. But sadly, many who have been entranced by the admittedly awesome accomplishments of the West, those who have represented the essence of what became known in our society as intellectualism, have not only not solved the problem, but made it worse.

First, the shallowness of their view, the debate being

merely glossed over, has postponed the emergence of a real debate about the relationship between modernity and tradition. Second, dispensing with deeply rooted traditions, they have proved incapable of achieving anything of significance.

They have never found a place in the hearts of a people who have become habituated to tradition; they have not spoken a language comprehensible to the people, and thus have died in isolation, their words never gaining common currency. Or even worse, in order to survive they wrapped themselves around autocratic rulers, often becoming the tools of Western colonialism in their own countries.

In real life, neither religious decrees and mere wishful thinking can prevent the

advance of Western culture, nor can memoranda and doctrines uproot tradition. Human life is always changing, sometimes unconsciously and uncontrollably. The important thing is to see through which perspective we can maintain an instrumental presence in the process of change, so that instead of being at their mercy, we can .confront circumstances with awareness and intelligence

Alongside these two imagined solutions, there are reform-minded thinkers, in the developing world. While there is hope that this movement may be more successful, thus far it, too, has been beleaguered by the crisis that we face. This is because reformists rest on two fundamentals: one, a return to the self and reviving our historical-cultural identity, and two, a positive encounter with the achievements of human civilization, while being aware of the hegemonic and colonial legacy of the .West

Not only is there no unity of

p: ١١٠

vision about the 'self' that they want to return to, but also they cannot agree on precisely those aspects of the West that we must absorb and internalize. Thus reformists must be viewed as keen and aware pioneers who have tried to confront .their society's woes courageously to rid it of degrading conditions

Our past has been eventful, but our future remains uncertain. We are adrift in a world dominated by Western culture, politics, economics, and military might, and confront the idea of development which is a tested form of progress in the West. We must decide once and for all where we stand in relation to the West and how Western values are related to development, so that we can attain development without losing .our national identity or becoming dissolved in the West

Development, like many other contemporary concepts, has its roots in the West. Here is how I define it: to establish widespread welfare on the basis of the values and criteria of Western civilization. Do we not divide the world into the two camps of 'developed'-meaning built on Western values-and 'undeveloped'? Do we not think of those countries as 'developing' that are trying to modernize their way of life by emulating the West? It is here that the relationship between tradition and modernity .comes into focus

Development is a Western concept, based on Western civilization. Without knowing it we cannot know development, let alone make decisions about it or reject it. So, I believe that debating about development is premature

p: ۱۱۱

.before focusing on its underpinnings

There are those who claim that nations are doomed to remain backward, even to perish, unless they meet all of development's demands. Modernization, they say, is .necessary to achieve development

The above judgment is true if we see the West as the ultimate human civilization that is impossible to supersede in the future, but there are those who see the West as the latest but not the ultimate human civilization, which like all other human artifacts, is .tentative and susceptible to decay

Of course, this does not mean denying development or surrendering to the views of regressive traditionalists; it means rejecting the prescriptions of those who prescribe complete and rapid Westernization. While the prescriptions of thinkers usually differ from those of the power elite, development will be achieved more fully if policy making is attuned, to the prescriptions of rational thought, not itself a constraint on .thinking

Our role as thinkers is to realize that even if development means repeating the Western experience, we still have to fathom its basic tenets and their implications. This represents the most important calling for real intellectualism and thinking. The truth of the matter is that without rationality, real development will be impossible to .attain

First, development is not a mechanical process that can be achieved in the absence of rational human beings. And second, a society that is devoid of rational thinking will lose its balance as soon as it encounters problems, and it is amply clear that human difficulties cannot be

solved through reliance on force, strict laws, and the decrees of politicians, even though difficulties might be submerged by these means for a while. The sad experience of the 'Westoxicated' and the tradition-bound is before us, and we must .learn from their mistakes so we do not repeat them

Modern civilization is the important reality of our age and has brought many monumental benefits to humanity. But its faults are many as well, and these faults are not limited to Westerners' political and economic atrocities outside their geographic borders. The West faces serious internal crises in its economy, society, and in its thinking. For those of us living outside the West, if we do not feel overwhelmed and taken in by the West, we will at least be better judges of the disasters brought about .by Western colonialism for non-Westerners

Western civilization is a human construct, and thus tentative and prone to decay,

unless someone claims unrealistically that with the dawn of modern civilization, the fountain of human curiosity and creativity has dried up. Civilization is an answer to the .curiosity of humans who never stop questioning their world

The ever-changing needs of humans compel them to fulfill these needs, and civilization is the answer to the questions one faces. Of course, there are important questions and needs history that spur the emergence of civilizations, and these questions are themselves affected by the time and place in which they arise. That is why civilizations change and there is no such thing as

p: ۱۱۳

an ultimate and eternal civilization. For as long as there are humans, so will be their curiosity and needs. With each question that is answered and each need that is .fulfilled, humans are confronted with new questions and needs

Each civilization remains standing until it can harness its inner power to offer answers to human questions and to fulfill human needs, but civilization, similar to all secular things, is limited. When it depletes its natural strength and cannot find answers to new questions, slowly the exuberance of followers of this civilization will vanish, and that is .how civilizations decay and perish

Western civilization has encountered great crises, and by relying on its natural strengths, it has been able to pass through them, beginning in the nineteenth century and culminating in the two world wars of the twentieth century. But the liberal and capitalist West managed to confront and outlive its socialist opponent through .adjusting its institutions

Precipitated by its own internal weaknesses, socialism's demise dazzled the world. It is nonetheless clear that the West is faced with other deep crises, crises that have arisen out of questioning the core values of the West, evident in a decrease in

confidence in its capabilities and permanence. These questions are now more pressing and pertinent than ever. Thus, objections to the moral and philosophical .bases of the West are more common today

It is true that the inability of the culture of the Middle Ages to offer answers to human curiosity and needs, and resorting to

p: ۱۱۴

physical and psychological force to suppress those questions and needs, led to an intellectual and social explosion which caused the rule of the Church and feudal overlords to crumble. But it would be naive to think of these conscious questions and needs as the sole cause of the emergence of modern civilization. These questions and needs emerged amid motivations, which were outside the realm of logic and .rationality

First, the harsh restrictions imposed by the Church and feudalism were instrumental in bringing about a reaction in the opposite direction. The Church had given its practices a sacred facade such that its excesses led Westerners not only to overturn .the extant social order, but to doubt the whole validity of religion and spirituality

At the same time, hedonism and greed played a great role in the birth and rise of .modern civilization, which has trampled on higher truths and spirituality

Was the role of the bourgeoisie any less significant to the development of modernity than that of the intellectual founders of the movement? What drove the bourgeois class was certainly not a restless search for truth and justice, and the rescue of these two ends from the excesses of the Church and feudalism, but the will to acquire .wealth

Liberty, brotherhood, and egalitarianism were the key promises of the French revolution, but these promises were themselves tools in the hands of the new bourgeois class as it competed with the aristocracy for power, driven by the boundless ambition that characterized the new-rich. It is even

possible to claim that the scientists and intellectuals of modernity were actually providing rational and intellectual justification for the wants and ambitions of the new .class

As we praise the many achievements of Western civilization such as modern science, technology, freedom of thought, and democracy, we cannot overlook the colonialism, the use of deadly force against non-Westerners, the plunder of other peoples' material and cultural riches, polluting the earth's environment, perpetuating half-.truths and lies, and the opportunism that also characterize the West

Thus we cannot surrender to all that is Western. At the same time we cannot deal with tradition superficially; tradition is the essence of the socio-historical achievements of a people, especially important to us since we have had a rich culture and history. As Aristotle says in his Politics, habit and tradition play an important role in .keeping a good society together

Breaking with tradition means destroying the cultural and historical heritage of a people, but if a people are to evolve, they must understand their past to see where they are in their process of historical evolution. Thus, dismantling aspects of tradition .must be based on indigenous models, not imported and artificial

Indeed, delving deeply into their tradition awakened Westerners at the dawn of

modernity. Thinkers revisited the artistic tradition of the Greeks and the social traditions of Rome. Religious believers returned to what they considered to be the most authentic aspects of Christianity, and hence the Reformation. These returns to :tradition and reappraisals ushered in the new epoch

In

such a world, the bourgeoisie, aided by secular thinkers, achieved victory on the basis of the new thinking which rested on a return to previous ways of rational thinking. Thus, even in the itself a constraint on thinking. Thus, even in the effort to dismantle .tradition, there is no escaping tradition

We who have the will to evolve, and who want to take the reins of destiny into our hands to be able to transform it, must ensure that our seeking of Western models of development does not lead to destroying our heritage. We can only critique tradition if we have a firm sense of our own identity; a tradition less people are invariably devoid .of serious thought. Weak-willed and brittle, they are at the mercy of events

This aside, there is the practical problem that tradition is too deeply rooted in human life to be dismantled by the mere decree of politicians or prescriptions of intellectuals. Even worse, forcing this process may actually exacerbate problems and rob society of .identity. But this is not the same as surrendering to tradition unconditionally

Tradition, much like civilization, is a human construct and susceptible to change. The continuous transformation of traditions at varying speeds all through history is ultimate proof that further change is inevitable. The important issue is to what extent

the process of change is initiated consciously with maximum participation of the people themselves, instead of being handed down from above or being forced upon .people by circumstance

Traditions are bound to evolve. The

p: ۱۱۷

question remains whether or not people should ever be forced to maintain traditions .in spite of needs, desires, and requirements of the human way of life

Tradition is dependent on the understanding and intuition of people, who are they prone to change. This change does not negate the existence of all absolutes, but merely necessitates the recognition that our interpretations of the absolute change ?over time. Has human understanding of the divine been constant over history

The important point is that as interpretations get entrenched, as they sink into the historical memory of a people and a society, turning away from them becomes difficult, and this difficulty is exacerbated when traditions adopt the veneer of sanctity such that any criticism or objection directed at these habits and interpretations is viewed as sacrilege. Combating sacrilege is a divine duty, making this problem more .acute in religious societies

It is certain that our thinking and lifestyles need transformation. Much of the time, tradition is the greatest obstacle to development, unless we actively participate in .transforming and reconstructing it

Our society needs to evolve and transform itself, but we must know that development

in its Western sense is merely one form of transformation, not the only form. Development in the West is the upshot of reliance on tradition and deep historical understanding which paved the way for a new understanding of humans and being .among Westerners

Westerners have been through a long and difficult process. Only after passing .through many vicissitudes have they achieved rational wisdom and will

The search for truth, as well as competition, vindictiveness, and ambition have all .combined to make modernity and development appear

We live in a time when the inner weaknesses of the West are becoming evident not only to those outside the West, but to Westerners themselves, who now doubt their noble manifest destiny. Awareness of this issue compels us to refrain from buying fully into Western notions of development. At the same time, we cannot view tradition .as being immutable and divine either

Therefore, we face two human challenges, one deeply rooted in our society, the other imported and in some instances dominant over us, namely modern civilization. The .important thing is to not defy either of these, as some have done

To understand today, we must know the demands of tomorrow, and to properly understand the future, we have no choice but to acquaint ourselves with our history. Tomorrow is a time when humanity transcends today's civilization, and those who get there sooner will be those who are familiar with the past and focus on the future, not the rigidly tradition-bound, nor the superficially-modern who understand only the .facade of today's civilization

Why not focus on the coming civilization, and adjust all transformations to fit that .ideal. Such an ambitious plan requires that we critique both modernity and tradition

Of course, entering the future does not imply dismantling today. Only those who reach a level of growth, awareness and courage to be able to incorporate all the achievements of human kind can be build

.a new epoch and become masters of tomorrow

We are by no means doomed to dissolve into modern civilization, but we cannot ignore its many great scientific, social, and political achievements. Can we not transcend the present day to establish a new relationship to existence and achieve a new vision, and in its shadow become the source of a new civilization, which, while resting on our historical identity, and benefiting from the accomplishments of modern ?civilization, could inaugurate a new chapter in human life

This is especially promising for us Iranians and Muslims who have a record of creating civilizations that have played a central role in human history. Can we not be the originator of civilization again? Of course this does not mean that we should return to the past to stay there-which would be regressive-but that we must find a secure launching ground to move beyond the present and toward a future that is dependent .on our present and our past

Freedom and Development

Nassereddin Shah inaugurated the Dar-Alfonun, Iran's first technical school of higher education, on the fifth of Rabi al Awwal, ۱۲۶۸ AH (October ۲۷, ۱۸۵۱). This event marked the birth of the idea of 'development' as we know it in Iran today. Our intense preoccupation with defining development, and how we might achieve it a full century

and a half after the founding of the school, shows that we have not achieved .development. We must try to find out why

Here I do not wish to address the complex

p: ۱۲۰

idea of cultural development. I hope that the vision and effort of our eminent thinkers will take the ambiguity out of the meaning of development. Instead I. wish to put forth a general discussion of the cultural prerequisites of development, not the meaning of development itself. In my view, development is a form of desirable transformation in society. In its contemporary meaning, development is merely one form of .transformation. Three points are essential to consider

First, no transformation will be humane and productive unless people knowingly and willingly participate in the process of that transformation. Second, the active and willing presence of humans in the process of development requires that serious and established thinking be present in large parts of society. Third, sustainable and .productive thinking in society has to be based, first and foremost, on freedom

Thus we cannot expect any positive transformations anywhere unless the yearning for freedom is fulfilled. That is, the freedom to think and the security to express new thinking. The way I see it, development is a Western construct, and all those who seek development must become modern. This means that development as currently defined is a branch of the tree of modern civilization. If that civilization arrives, so will .development

Indeed, those who claim that adopting Western thinking and values is a necessary precondition of development are not misguided. Alongside Western thinking and

.wisdom, the Western temperament and ethic must also be adopted

But I also believe that development, as conceived today, is only one form

of transformation and evolution in human society, not the only and exclusive version of it. Certainly this transformation and evolution has brought many benefits to humanity, but I believe that it has caused much harm as well. In looking at Western civilization and its idea of development, many realities have been overlooked and .ignored with devastating consequences

We who discuss development today cannot go back four hundred years to the time when the West started the journey in order to get to where it is today. Instead, the vast experience of Westerners is before us, and if we are thoughtful; we must choose our future path on the basis of this experience. This means that we must see the strengths and shortcomings of the Western experience to arrive at a better and more .desirable choice

Negating the exclusivity of progress in its current form, which has been called development, is not to deny the realities of modern civilization, and one can say with certainty that in any society that wants to advance, nothing instrumental will happen unless its people incorporate Western civilization's achievements, instead of trying to .circumvent them

This requires that we become familiar with Western civilization, to be in touch with its spirit, which is modernity. Those who are not familiar with this spirit will never be able to effect positive change in their lives. Thus the main criterion of transformation is incorporating Western civilization into one's own thinking, and the goal of this familiarity with the West understands

.the main tenets of modernity, which is hidden behind many appearances

Sadly, nations such as we are still devoid of such understanding. As Abdulhadi Haeri has put it, we have yet to become familiar with the two countenances of Western civilization. Our encounter with the West has been mostly superficial. We have vacillated between the equally harmful extremes of either being taken in or .entranced by the West, or loathing and rejecting it

In my view the discussion of development requires a fundamental look at what Western civilization is and how we are related to it. If this debate begins in earnest, .the debate on development will advance more rapidly and with greater certainty

Why is it that a century and half after the creation of Dar-Alfonun, the mother of modern scientific schooling in Iran, we are still mired in the same question of what ?development is and why we have not achieved it

The attempt to answer this important question must begin by relating another historical anecdote. On Friday, the seventeenth of Rabi al Awwal, ۱۲۶۸ AH (November ۹, ۱۸۵۱), a mere twelve days after Dar-Alfonun was inaugurated, Nassereddin Shah had Amirkabir- the very man by whose vision and wisdom that school was conceived- put to death in the Feen bathhouse in the city of Kashan. In my view, the secret of our .malaise lies therein

Centuries of our history have been governed not by the effort and thoughtfulness of the people of this land, but by autocratic and whimsical rulers, and because of

p: ۱۲۳

the existence of authoritarianism and its central role in our society, our people have .not had the opportunity to be active in their own society

Freedom of thought, which is the highest emblem of being and the key condition of our presence on the stage of destiny, as well as the main impetus for growth and dynamism in life, has not been respected. In other words, the secret of our greatest historical problems, to borrow from Farabi, has been the dominance of deceit and craftiness on our destiny, a deceit that was already deeply rooted before the advent .of Islam

Rampant corruption in preIslamic, Sasanid Iran had brought the country to the brink of explosion. With the coming of Islam, the foundations of, deceit began to shake, but a mere forty years after the coming of Islam, in the period known as the Rashed Caliphate, authoritarianism of a more dangerous form came to govern the destiny of the Islamic community, for this time authoritarianism and tyranny adopted the guise .of Islamic legitimacy

As Islamic civilization came to replace Sasanid Persian civilization or other civilizations, it was expected that the political manifestations of those civilizations would also be replaced. Especially at the beginning of Islamic civilization, there was much hope in the new political environment. The legitimacy of concepts such as collective decision making, reconciliation, and the supremacy of the public interest was upheld by the behavior of the prophet himself and to some extent by the Caliphs who succeeded him, especially

.by Imam ‘Ali

A new horizon dawned over people. Had it been allowed to continue, it could have spurred serious thinking, and the Islamic community would have undoubtedly had a different destiny. But sadly, the dark shadow of tyranny began to dominate Muslims. Even more sadly, effort was put into passing this tyranny off as the pillar of the new way of life. The autocratic form of policy grew into a legacy, a relic that led to the .decline and degradation of the civilization

In such an atmosphere, reflection about subjects' political destiny was stifled, and the only thinker who managed to dedicate deep thought to philosophy, politics, and civic discourse was Farabi, the founder of Islamic philosophy, with whom the idea begins and terminates at the same time. After him, thought left the sphere of secular affairs, and because of the dominance of despotism and its consequences, deep investigation became focused strictly on esoteric and metaphysical phenomena, and we see that despite the advancement of knowledge about the supernatural, philosophical thinking .on politics, society, and different social spheres became almost entirely dormant

Alongside metaphysical philosophy, another form of thinking, namely Sufism and mysticism, gained currency, especially among the elite. And although Sufism can be viewed in some instances as a response and complaint to unpleasant and hapless circumstances, it ,was a wrong and ill-fated response. Instead of challenging the bitterness of ,extant political reality and looking for a way of changing that reality through offering alternative realities and visions, Sufism, at

least its extreme versions, resisted' the dominant political order by negating the .relevance of politics and political' thought altogether

As Farabi has said, many from this camp put forth the proposition that real understanding and salvation could only come from negating all that pertains to this world, including civil society. This means that by rejecting and staying away from politics, they left society in the bloodstained hands of autocrats. Instead of resisting .injustice, they closed their eyes, even though they did not cooperate with oppressors

At the same time, a sort of insularity and parochialism began to dominate Muslims, and this marginalized even Islamic philosophy, as esoteric and metaphysical as it was. What gained prominence as political thought was a theoretical-practical system,

apparently the creation of the famed Shafi'ite theologian of the Abbasid period and the chief magistrate of Baghdad, Abolhassan al-Mawardy, who wrote the important .book, Al-Ahkam al-Soltaniyyah-Commandments of Kingship

The Hanbalid interpretation of al-Mawardy was later put forward in a book with the same title by Abu 'Ali al-Farra. These two books implicitly legitimized the extent of Abbasid authoritarianism and also proposed a system of laws based on Islamic thought for the governance of Muslim society, a society whose main pillar of .organization was Islamic jurisprudence

Yet religious law itself is dependent on thought, and does not in and of itself give form and function to thoughts. Where there is rational thinking in society, religious law will be vibrant, instrumental; and adaptive. Through rational thinking a jurisconsult can develop

p: ۱۲۶

a system of law which is adaptive, appropriate, and. effective. Instead, the religious law that was supposed to be based on rational thought became the basis of its form .and function

Concurrently, a different form of political thought gained currency, which was in essence the revival of a previously examined pre-Islamic paradigm. Important thinkers such as Abolhassan 'Ameri and Moskuya helped bring back the preIslamic tradition of authoritarianism from ancient Persia. The work of Nezam al-Mulk and al-Ghazali (if the latter part of Nasihat al-Moluk could authentically be attributed to him) further solidified this thinking, turning it into one of the main obstacles of serious .thought for Muslims

This was a very unfortunate development, but even sadder was the fact that Muslims took their hapless fate as manifest destiny, as the ineluctable work of God and nature,

and after this, people could not think beyond authoritarianism in the sphere of politics. People either submitted to this fate, or even if they thought of combating the extant authoritarianism, they could not find a mode of resistance other than force and the .sword

Confrontations in the world of ideas, instead of focusing on the roots of the authoritarianism, became enmeshed in factional squabbles. If a group found that the rulers protected their factional interests, they cooperated with them, and if their own interests were threatened, they fought with the rulers. The last example of this was the symbiosis of senior Shiite clergy with the Safavid autocratic Shiite despots, as the former justified the latter's

p: ۱۲۷

rule: Far less common in the history of our political thought is questioning the very .nature of authoritarianism and searching for ways to overcome it

From this general historical discussion I will now try to shed light on the problem of our own underdevelopment and why a century and half after the founding of the Dar-Alfonun, we are still on the first step. Again, transformation and progress require thought, and thought only flourishes in an atmosphere of freedom. But our history has not allowed human character to grow and to be appreciated, and thus the basic human yearning for thinking and freedom has been unattended at best and negated .at worst

In the past two hundred years we have encountered an additional problem, namely authoritarianism and dictatorship of a more dangerous and destructive character that took over our society. In this period, the hideous phenomenon of colonialism became widespread in the world, afflicting us with a colonialism dependent dictatorship. Dictatorship no longer appeared as one powerful tribe or nation dominating us, but

came in the form of an internal authoritarianism, which was dependent on protecting the interests of a global colonist. Foreign colonist powers wanted to rob all our material and spiritual resources, propping up dictatorships as tame and complacent .tools for the realization of their goals

Unfortunately, because of what has happened to us, our temperament has not been trained to be receptive to freedom such that in the past half-century, every time the ground has been ripe for us to experience

.freedom, we have squandered the opportunity

In the aftermath of August ۲۵, ۱۹۴۱, when an atmosphere of relative freedom came about in Iran, social movements became confused and incapacitated, and opportunists tried to use this freedom to monopolize power. Foreign hands conspired to disallow the natural order of freedom from taking hold in society. This state of chaos, propelled by the treachery of some camps and the conspiracy of foreigners, created a situation that eventually led to the black coup d'état of ۱۹۵۳. Finally, the Islamic revolution came to our rescue, showing us the beautiful face of freedom once .more

Today, whatever supporters and critics think of this revolution, they should concede by virtue of fairness that Iran's Islamic revolution possesses two distinct characteristics. First, while in countries such as ours, anti-colonial struggles have often taken a militaristic form, in our case the authoritarianism that was supported by imperialism was not overthrown by the force of guns, but by the presence of the .masses and the power of discourse and enlightenment

And second, the revolution began its life with freedom, not suppression, so much so that in the first years after its victory, the revolution was even on the verge of

descending into anarchy. But as despotism had become second nature to us through .our dark past, we were unable to benefit from this freedom properly

Undoubtedly, the foreign hand that over the past two centuries had overtly and covertly meddled in our internal affairs, did not sit idly by, and through conspiracy

p: ۱۲۹

and its invisible agents, prevented us from becoming acquainted with freedom in a .natural way, to learn its advantages, and to grapple with its challenges

In our universities there were groups who took up armed struggle to overthrow the government. A destructive atmosphere took hold, making all parties suspicious of all others. It is natural that the revolution's leaders could not sit idly by lest the bitter experience of ۱۹۵۳ repeat itself. Thus, in running the country, extreme measures had .to be taken to prevent a deep descent into anarchy

At the same time, the extenuating circumstances after the revolution gave some the excuse to suppress freedom as the perceived source of dislocation in society, instead .of understanding the historical obstacles to freedom

They covered their closed-minded ways under the guise of religion, when in fact their religion was nothing but a series of mental and emotional habits, habits that .would be questioned in an atmosphere of freedom where ideas encountered one another freely. Thus there were many who, instead of scrutinizing the roots and causes that led freedom to descend into anarchy and destruction, began to oppose freedom. .Willingly or not, they saw religious and national interest as being opposed to freedom

Destroying the atmosphere of peace in the name of freedom, and destroying freedom in the name of religion and national interest, represent two sides of the same coin, both symptomatic of the historical ailment that we suffer from due to centuries of despotic rule which has shaped our temperament

and made it irreconcilable with freedom. In scrutinizing the source of our problems, .we cannot blame solely the government

Before that, we ourselves must learn how we can come to deserve freedom and rights. Today in universities, in our schools, and at home, we are incapable of exercising tolerance toward one another. Let us not doubt that unless we undergo an inner transformation, we cannot expect external forces to solve our problems for us. We have to understand that the experience of freedom does not come easily and that .this issue has two fundamental tenets

First, the effects of despotism have become second nature to us. We are all individually dictator-like in our own ways, and this unfortunate condition is evident in all strata and spheres of our society. And second, we want to experience freedom in a world that is dominated by grandiose powers who think only of their, own interests, interests that they view as being in conflict with the freedom of other countries, as they focus their immense political, military, informational, and economic power on protecting their interests. If the experience of freedom has encountered difficulties in .countries such as ours, we should not disregard the conspiracy of outsiders

Here we face a paradox. On the one hand, growth and progress are not possible without freedom, and on the other hand, freedom will not materialize and last unless ?society is mature and progressive. What is to be done

,I believe that if we are fair and profound in our thinking

we will reach the conclusion that freedom has priority over growth. Of course, the road to freedom and liberty is replete with danger and difficulty. Again, what I mean

by freedom is the freedom to think and the security to express new thinking, and .instituting a protective system for the security of the free-spirited and of thinkers

More important, I think, it is practically impossible to suppress thought, but if we live in an atmosphere of freedom, thought appears in a balanced and moderate way, and rationality becomes dominant, as the power to choose and the means of choice and progress become available to the people. But if freedom is absent, thoughts that will inevitably appear in the minds of thinkers will be driven underground, and may appear in violent and explosive form through the deeds of those who do not believe in thoughtful, peaceful discourse. It is necessary to explore the relationship between freedom and national security and the positive effect of the former on the latter, and .the destructive effect of the lack of freedom on social stability

The desired outcome is that the elite and thinkers reach a consensus that in today's world we must not search for a single Procrustean model of freedom for all nations. While the essence of freedom is the same, on the basis of their different social conditions and historical experiences, different nations may experience it in different .ways, and choose different ways and priorities regarding the demands of freedom

Second, let us try

p: ۱۳۲

to create the proper atmosphere so that we can extend tolerance to one another more easily and share each other's view of freedom, share our minimal expectations and priorities, and base this on the rule of law, ensuring the survival and protection of freedom. It is in such an atmosphere that our progress will be accelerated, .guaranteeing a brighter future for our people

Civilizations rise and fall. From the dawn of history this has been the fate of Sumerian, Chaldean, Assyrian, Chinese, Indian, Persian, Greek, Roman, and Islamic civilizations. At its zenith, Islam acted as the conduit between these ancient civilizations and the modern age. Today, it is Western civilization that reigns supreme, casting its shadow .upon all corners of the world

The Interplay of Civilizations

Unless they are completely unaware of each other's existence, civilizations ordinarily affect and transform one another. For instance, America's indigenous civilization was .completely unknown to the outside world until Europeans discovered the continent

But once the connection was made, the massive tide of explorers and immigrants who conquered and appropriated the new world could not be held back. Using their superior power and resources, the newcomers ruthlessly subjugated and destroyed the continent's old civilization. The wave of European immigrants that took over the Americas eventually succeeded in turning North America into the most powerful .center of Western civilization

Give-and-take among civilizations is the norm of history. Prior to the discovery of the Americas, the civilizations of Asia, Africa, and Europe had been in contact since antiquity, transforming one another

p: ۱۳۳

in various ways. Fundamentally influenced by Greek civilization, Islam played a central mediating role by introducing Europeans to the achievements of Greek thought and philosophy. Thus 'new' civilizations are never new in the true sense, for they always feed on the work of previous civilizations, appropriating and digesting all .that fits their needs, dispensing with all that does not

The Main Sources of the Emergence of Civilizations

Of the many factors that spur the emergence, rise, and demise of civilizations, two are fundamental: the dynamism of the human mind, and the concomitant surfacing of .new needs and necessities in human life

The human mind is instinctively active, perpetually driven by a burning curiosity that confronts a never-ending chain of new questions to which it must find answers, or it will not rest or be content. But once a discovery is made, the new answers bring to .view an untested world replete with new questions, an eternal cyclical process

At the same time, humans strive to fulfill their material needs, which beckons them to seek greater mastery over the natural world through invention and innovation. The combination of the will to dominate nature and the will to create alters the material and psychological makeup of the human world, and this creates new needs and .necessities

The dynamism of the human constitution and the resulting search for answers to pressing questions or needs spurs a constant transformation of the human historical consciousness. The same two fundamental qualities of humans that underpin the inevitability of change are also the cause of the emergence and decline

p: ۱۳۴

of civilizations. While other human, social, and natural factors slow down or accelerate the coming, going, and interchange of civilizations, the desire and need for change is .the most important in this regard

Every civilization is based on a specific world-view, which is itself shaped by a people's idiosyncratic historical experience. For as long as the existing worldview successfully addresses the fundamental questions and needs of a community, it remains intact. But when the collective consciousness and soul of a people outgrow the limitations of the existing civilization, the search for new ideas begins in earnest, often taking the form of turning to other civilizations for clues. This is the secret of the emergence, .flourishing, and falls of all civilizations

The Crisis of Civilizations

When it is first born and subsequently at the point of its demise, each civilization places its adherents in a state of crisis. At first, when a new covenant arises in the history of a people and the ground is ripe for the emergence of a new civilization, the social fabric is strained. The new civilization heralds new and often revolutionary .customs and mores

But the previous civilization will not easily relinquish its entrenched and institutionalized dominance. Historically shaped social habits are hard to break. Much of society remains glued to the mental and emotional predilections of the previous era. The need to throw out the deeply ingrained attachments and replace them with a .new worldview induces a painful identity crisis

At the same time, the new civilization has not been tried out

p: ۱۳۵

in real life. Its inner contradictions are hidden from view, for it has not passed the litmus test of experience. To endure and lay roots, the new civilization must adapt and fine-tune itself as it encounters the evolving realities of social life. Until this process of .adaptation and transformation reaches its fruition, social identity crisis is the norm

The other instance of crisis, at the point of the demise of a civilization, appears when the dominant worldview cannot satisfy the psychological, material, and social needs of its constituents. People begin to experience a troubling void and sterility. Again, the historically conditioned predilections that are rendered anachronistic will not be easily abandoned. This state of limbo can merely offer the veneer of civilization bereft of substance and soul. An existential void sets in that brings on a full-blown identity (crisis.(۱

This discussion is meant to set up the fundamental question, what historical condition ?does our own society live in and what is going to become of it

Crisis in the West

Indeed, ours is the age of the dominance and entrenchment of Western civilization, a civilization that has lived for more than four centuries and has made great strides in science, politics, and social regulation. But we must accept that the West today faces an acute crisis, a crisis in its thought and all other spheres. Those familiar with the history of Western civilization and its philosophical, scientific, and artistic expressions can more or less see the signs of this crisis. The West was not confronted with a

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۱ - This argument does not imply that each of the two types of crisis necessarily follows the other. Because of the connection of the 'death crisis' of the first civilization to the 'birth crisis' of the second, they must not be viewed as being identical because: First, my focus is on the crisis that one civilization creates, one at the peak of civilization and the other at its nadir, not the crisis of the end of one and the birth of the second. Second, even if the crisis of the end of one civilization and the crisis of the birth of another civilization coincide, this does not mean that we should see them as

the being one and the same, for these two crises are qualitatively different in nature, similar to the way life and death are different. Third, it is not as though as soon as a civilization dies there is immediately another one to replace it. Instead, a civilization comes, stays for centuries and then leaves. Different societies provide different breeding grounds for civilizations. To know this for certain requires greater and more careful scrutiny, which this author has not had the chance to undertake. Nonetheless, .we should not doubt the qualitative difference between these two kinds of crisis

crisis of this magnitude in the eighteenth and part of the nineteenth century. What ?does the current crisis signify

It is possible to assert that Western civilization is worn out and senile. Four centuries is a long time for a civilization-even though it is possible that in the past some civilizations may have lived longer than this. But science, technology, and electronic communication have vastly accelerated the pace of change like never before. The life of Western civilization from the Renaissance to the present cannot be viewed as .short, and to treat Western civilization as old would not be an exaggeration

?From Crisis to Demise of the West

This is not an easy question to take on. Crises are sometimes limited and temporary. This has often occurred in the life of civilizations, which have displayed the ability to confront crises successfully- and remain intact. For example, in the nineteenth .century, the east managed to successfully surmount the crisis that it encountered

The capitalist order, which represents a key feature of Western civilization, encountered great difficulties in the second half of the nineteenth century and during the two world wars of the first half of the twentieth century. But Marxism came to its rescue. The West managed to modify its mental and material structures, coming out .of these crises in one piece

Despite the claims of its protagonists, Marxism was an impractical and unrealistic philosophy. Precisely because of these deficiencies and its lack of adaptability, it did not last. It was kept standing for seventy years only through the use of force

p: ۱۳۷

and propaganda. Still, although Marx did not offer a solid and comprehensive philosophy, he was a great pathologist of the capitalist order.

What Marxists proposed forced the West to become introspective and to search for ways of adjusting capitalism's methods to the demands of the time, and to modify its social, economic, and political order from within. One key tactic of the West was to replace its old colonialism-which was sowing the seeds of a worldwide explosion-with neocolonialism. This allowed the West to contain and defuse the crisis, postponing its reemergence for a while.

But what about the present crisis? Can the West also pass through this difficult period unscathed? We cannot predict this with certainty, but to the extent that human understanding and research allows, we can collect evidence and observe empirical reality and arrive at a theory on that basis. This is an important task for objective and judicious academic research.

The West's Antidotes for Crisis

The West has adopted a strategy similar to the one it used at the beginning of this century which allowed it to circumvent previous crises: by modifying the ways of old colonialism into a more sophisticated neocolonialism. The so-called 'new world order' is the West's new strategy for handling a crisis that has shaken it at the core.

Presenting itself as the main sponsor and protector of the 'new world order', the

United States is focused on adapting neocolonialism(۱) to the new age. The logic of this transformation is similar to the shift from old colonialism to neocolonialism. There is

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۱- The very quest for a 'new world order' is an obvious sign that the current order is under serious strain as it fails to meet people's fundamental needs. The evermore frequent and extensive discussion of the new 'order', especially in the West, is itself proof for the existence of a crisis in the West and in the rest of the world. We cannot overlook the fact that oppressive powers, led by the United States, continue their deceitful attempt to manipulate the current historical moment and world consciousness to assert their destructive domination of the developing world under the guise of the 'new world order'. This is an attempt to subvert and prevent fundamental transformation in the current order that would benefit all of humanity. There is voluminous material on the 'new world order', which I defer to another occasion.

other evidence attesting to the decline of the current Western civilization as well. While it is certain that Western civilization is old and worn out, the question of whether it has reached the end of its path needs more thinking and scrutiny. What does the future hold?

Crisis in Our Revolutionary Society

Our society also confronts a crisis today, and although this crisis is to some extent attributable to global conditions, it is different from the West's crisis. Through our revolution we tried to free ourselves from the shackles of the West's domination.

Our revolution made us introspective, we decided to struggle for our independence, to be masters of our own fate. In this regard, we have made great headway in the

political, economic, and cultural spheres. But is it possible that we would fall into the West's trap of domination again? This depends on the path we choose in the future .and on what the West's own destiny is

The Islamic revolution was a momentous event in the history of the Iranian nation and the Islamic community, and we can rightly say that because of our revolution we have dispensed with many borrowed and Western values that dominated our thinking. Through realizing our own authentic historical and cultural identity, we have .laid a completely new groundwork for regulating our society

Our revolution proposed the creation of a religiously based system and our society accepted this with enthusiasm and took steps to reach this great goal. The crisis that we experience today can only be remedied if we

p: ١٣٩

shed the vestiges of our borrowed identity and don a new garb. Our current crisis is the crisis of birth, which I referred to earlier. Our new civilization is on the verge of .emergence

We cannot confront this crisis with trepidation. We must embrace it boldly and intelligently. Only when we have understood the most fundamental historical .questions of this epoch can we develop the willingness to solve them

We wish to base our life on the tenets of Islam; we possess the will to create an Islamic civilization. At a time when Western civilization is going through its last days, or at least experiencing senility, we must ask, did not Islamic civilization already emerge once and end centuries ago? And does not the death of a civilization mean that we can no longer base thought and action on its teachings? Does not this rule

apply to our history? Does the coming and passing of Islamic civilization mean that the ?period of Islam, which provided the basis for Islamic civilization, is over

If the answer to this question is affirmative, has our revolution been a fruitless effort moving against the traditions of creation and laws that govern the march of civilizations? This is one of the most important and pressing questions that confronts our revolution. If we do not approach it with level-headedness and objectivity, if we cannot find a solid answer to this question, our revolution will inevitably encounter .great danger and difficulty

My answer to the above question is negative. But with

p: ۱۴۰

this answer I do not want to debunk the rule that I proposed about civilizations. Generally, I believe that the law holds, but on the basis of my view of religion, I take this case not as a falsifier of the above but as falling outside its purview. For what creates a civilization is the vision and effort of humans, while religion is above and .beyond the vision of individuals and societies and thus transcends civilizations

If the sun has set on Islamic civilization despite its many monumental achievements, a certain view of religion-which was appropriate for that period-has ended, not the .age of religion itself

One of the greatest difficulties that religions have encountered historically has arisen out of confusing the specific religious teachings designed for specific times and places with the idea of religion itself. Naturally, with the obsolescence of age- and place-specific religious thought, some have the impression that the era of religion is over as

well. But religion transcends the specific civilizations that it gives rise to. Civilization addresses specific needs and dilemmas of a community in a particular time and place. When conditions and times change, new questions arise that in turn require new .answers-and hence a new civilization

Religion, on the other hand, sheds light on questions of eternity, charting a general and timeless path for humanity, giving direction to life despite its ever-changing circumstances. Religion guides human talents to their plateau, instilling in people a .sense of duty in different historical conditions

Thus if we think of

p: ۱۴۱

religion as being identical to civilization or culture, then the passing of civilization must imply that the era of religion is over as well. But if we believe that religion supersedes and transcends civilization and the specific mores of community, then religion can contain many different interpretations that give rise to various civilizations. The inevitable transformations of human life will do no damage to the eternal life of .religion

In this view, the core of religion possesses such dynamism that in any age it can provide answers to questions and a fulfillment of needs. Thus, while the old Islamic civilization has vanished, religion stands deeply rooted and can generate new civilizations, even though the specific interpretations of religion which have spawned .past Islamic civilizations have withered

With this general picture, I will try to address a number of pressing issues that

.confront our society today

Our vision of consolidating a system of religious governance in our future-oriented society cannot be materialized in a vacuum. We cannot implement this vision without full contact with the international community. We have come upon this important task at a time when Western civilization dominates the world. Yet simultaneously we must try to free ourselves from the domination of the West. It is thus natural that we .confront the West, and the upshot of this confrontation will determine our future

Two Countenances of the West

The West displays two features: one political, the other intellectual. Its political orientation serves as the most outward manifestation or veneer of western civilization. The intellectual foundations of Western

civilization illustrate its general world view. We must diligently distinguish between these two aspects. Only then can we find the proper way of confronting the West. .This path must be traveled with prudence

Even though the West has grown old, it maintains tremendous political, economic, military, and technological power, simultaneously wielding a formidable propaganda and communication apparatus to manage the world's perceptions. Equally important, .the global economy is controlled and regulated by Western financial institutions

The West's advanced systems and institutions often legitimize its political power, ensuring its decisive presence in all significant global developments. The military might of Western capitalism is also vast, and even if we concede that official military pacts are not as common as they were, the military and destructive power of the

.West remains intact

Politically, the West aims to govern all corners of the world and to dominate the theory and practice of international relations. It possesses the material and symbolic sources of power simultaneously, and it will stop at nothing to achieve its goals and .protect its interests. Our struggle with the West is of life and-death importance

In its political embodiment, the West does not wish us-or any people-to be independent, free, and masters of our own fate. For if one feature of Western imperialism is violating others' territories and exploiting their economies, the concomitant feature is dominating the world of ideas. The West propagates a world .view that lures its prey into subjugation

We confront a determined enemy that brings all of its material, military, and

p: ۱۴۳

informational resources to convince us to surrender, or risk being destroyed if we resist. The bitter experience of confrontation between domination-seeking powers .and the oppressed masses is too evident to be hidden to anyone

In political confrontations the enemy uses the mask of science and culture to deceive us. But in reality its only wish is to induce a people to surrender to its wishes and serve its interests, and to appropriate all of the victims' resources to serve the imperialist .power

Although the West has no qualms about using the most repressive and violent techniques, even its military and overtly oppressive measures are shrouded in .seemingly humanistic and misleading guises that divert public opinion from reality

When colonial powers violate other peoples, they never concede that their aim is to rob the victims' resources or to subjugate them politically. Instead, by abusing their persuasive powers, they try to disguise their crimes through words and ideas that are .acceptable to all of humanity

From old times, colonial powers have used the excuse of developing and civilizing other peoples to violate them and rape their lands. Today, like before, the political .motto of the West remains defending freedom, human rights, and democracy

At this juncture our struggle against the West is central to our survival. Any form of reconciliation and appeasement, given the penchant of the opponent for deception, will lead to nothing but our debasement and trampling on our pride. We must struggle against this with all our might, and victory is not beyond

our reach. We must depend on God and ask for His guidance, relying on our own .historical identity which we have regained through our revolution

With faith in the power of an awakened people and by strengthening the desire for independence and freedom, we must stand firmly opposed to an enemy that lacks humanitarian incentives. This is indeed possible. The awesome resistance of our nation to the conspiracies and crimes of the oppressors can be a lesson for all nations .who wish to regain their independence and pride

Yet, while ignoring the politically treacherous goals and conspiracies of the West can be catastrophic, we cannot see the West merely in political terms or reduce its whole .civilization to political issues. This would also lead us to a harmful dead end

Western-civilization is not limited to its political aspects. Alongside Western politics, there is a system of values and thinking which we must also come to understand and learn to deal with. Here we are confronted with our philosophical and moral opposite, not just with a political rival. To understand the West, the best tool is rationality, not

heated, flag-waving emotionalism. Not just here, but nowhere, can force offer an effective response to a way of thinking that we consider flawed. That would be self-.defeating and counterproductive

However, mired as they are in shallowness and hype, it is possible that opportunists will take any thought and culture that their audience dislikes and give it political salience and call it a conspiracy to destroy their

p: ۱۴۵

political base. This does not come from contemplation but from the need to justify their irrational encounter with opposite views, obviating the need for education and a .more powerful logic. This is very common among the overly politicized

Resorting to force is appropriate in confronting a military invasion, conspiracy, or political sabotage. But the way to oppose thought and culture is not through the use of military, security, and judicial means, for using force only adds fuel to the opposite side's fire. We must confront the thought of the opponent by relying on rationality and enlightenment and through offering more powerful and compelling counter .arguments

Only comprehensive and attractive thinking can repel this sort of danger. If we do not possess such logic and knowledge, we must endeavor to attain it as our first priority. Islam furnishes us with such a capability. And if some Muslims are devoid of it, the .fault lies with them, not with Islam

If, God forbid, some people want to impose their rigid thinking on Islam and call it God's religion-since they lack the intellectual power to confront the opposite side's thinking on its own terms-they resort to fanaticism. This merely harms Islam, without

.achieving the aims of those people

In rejecting the West we wish to free ourselves from its political, mental, cultural, and economic domination, for as Muslims, we differ from them fundamentally in world view and values. Thus, to understand our points of contention and to negate the rival's domination, we have no choice but

.to :appraise and understand the West precisely and objectively

We have to keep in mind that Western civilization rests on the idea of 'liberty' or 'freedom'. These are indeed the most cherished values for humanity in all ages, and to be fair, Western civilization's march from the Middle Ages to modern centuries has .broken many superstitions and chains in thought, politics, and society

The West has indeed freed humans from the shackles of many oppressive traditions. It has successfully cast aside the deification of regressive thinking that had been imposed on the masses in the name of religion. It has also broken down subjugation to autocratic rule. These are all positive steps and adaptive to the traditions of creation. Yet; at the, same time, the view of the West about humans and freedom has .been rigid and one dimensional, and this continues to take a heavy toll on humanity

When confronting the opponent in the name of rejecting the West and defending religion, if we stifle freedom we will have caused a great catastrophe. Neither the traditions of creation allow this nor does Islam desire it. But if rejecting the West means' critiquing its view of freedom, humanity, and the world, then we will have achieved our most fundamental historical mission. Indeed, we take issue with the .West on the notion of freedom

We do not think that the Western definition of freedom is complete. Nor can the

Western view of freedom guarantee human happiness. The West is so self-absorbed in

its historical setting and thoughts that it cannot see the calamities that its incorrect view of humanity and freedom has caused. If we look at the West from the outside, we can objectively judge this issue. But achieving this important task requires much .intellectual rigor and knowledge

Benefiting from the West's Experience

As Western civilization becomes increasingly worn out and senile, humanity is today searching for a new vision for its future, awaiting a new civilization which is more capable of meeting its material and spiritual needs and wants. Through our Islamic revolution, we have endeavored to create a new system whose values and visions differ markedly from what is prevalent in the Western-dominated world. Can we claim ?that our Islamic revolution has opened a new chapter in human history

As noted above, no civilization is independent of the influences of those that have preceded it. The nature of the human mind does not allow it to suddenly and .completely dispense with the experiences and knowledge of previous times

The secret of the evolution of human life on planet earth is that every person and generation starts its movement where others have left off. If all generations started and ended at the same point, human destiny would be no different from that of bees. The difference between humans and other social animals is that humans learn from their past experience, improve upon it, and leave their achievements for the next generation. This process has continued uninterrupted for as long there has been a human race. Thus, there

.is no limit to' human evolution

Civilization, which is the fruit of humans' intellectual emotional, and practical endeavors, works the same way. A vibrant, civilization-building thought is a thought that incorporates all the positive aspects of the previous civilizations, digests it, and .adds to it

Now, on the basis of our popular revolution we wish to construct an Islamic system. But we can only think of our revolution as giving rise to a new civilization if we have the ability to absorb the positive aspects of Western civilization and the wisdom to recognize the negative aspects of it and to refrain from absorbing them. This means that if we can break through the dead ends that the West has reached because of its .values, and pass through them unscathed, we will succeed in our mission

If we must adopt the positive features of Western civilization, simultaneously casting aside its deficiencies, we have no choice but to understand the West correctly and comprehensively in the first place. We must judge it fairly and objectively and learn from and use its strengths, staying clear of its defects by relying on our revolution's .Islamic values

It is obvious that this approach is different from a rigidly political appraisal of the West. Those who cannot separate the political West from the nonpolitical West are acting against the interests of the nation and the Islamic revolution, even though they may be doing so inadvertently. Here, introspection, rationality and objectivity will be .effective, not harsh words and violence

The Difficulties of Our Revolution

In all

fairness, our Islamic revolution has been the source of great transformations in many corners of the world, and we, as the source of revolution, are naturally the most affected by these transformations. In the wake of our revolution, we have a mission which is as grand and formidable as the challenges we encounter. Passing through this difficult stage requires much wisdom and far-sightedness, as well as patience and .perseverance

Although Islam had existed for centuries in the collective consciousness of believers as a collection of thoughts and values, our revolution propelled it into the contemporary political and social sphere, where it stands steadfast against its opponents. At the same time, this development has brought three novel challenges to the fore: our people's expectations, the opponent's treachery and conspiracy, and .discord within our society

First, our people's expectations. Now that a new system based on new ideas has taken over the reins of governance, people expect a great deal from it. This is especially true of those who have sacrificed for the system. Before the Islamic revolution, people did not have many expectations because the enemy, giving us the sense that we were not masters of our own fate, dominated our economy, culture, politics, and educational system. But as an Islamic and independent government has come to power-as all of the state's resources have been placed in Islam's hands- .people have the right to expect the fulfillment of their needs and wants

People wish to know specifically how the new system will regulate their lives

p: ۱۵۰

and guarantee their rights. They also want to know the system's policy toward .science, and technology, as well as social justice and equity

At this juncture, people will not be satisfied with promises alone; they want real, tangible, and practical results. Our system will be successful only if it can meet these .expectations

Some expectations are undoubtedly unrealistic. No government can work miracles overnight and eradicate all bottlenecks. Nor have all of people's expectations been based on a realistic appraisal of available resources. It is conceivable that unrealistic visions as well as impractical and unattainable ideologies have spurred these .exaggerated expectations

Still, government must have the power to satisfy people's needs and guide them to modify their expectations and views. If it is not possible to meet all expectations-and it is not-at least people have to be convinced that our orientation is generally toward a .fulfilling life, focused on meeting their spiritual and material needs

Our society has to believe that what the revolution was offered and what it expects of people will simultaneously meet individual and societal needs, utilizing all of society's human resources and achievements. Society must also believe that our system is not burdened with the shortcomings and strains that bedevil our opponents. The natural expectations of people put officials and the elite under great pressure to perform, and .the enemy fans the flames of people's expectations in various ways

Second, the opponent's treachery and conspiracy. Before the victory of our revolution

we had many theoretical disagreements with opposing schools of

p: ۱۵۱

thought. Those confrontations were easy to carry out because there was no real friction. But when ideas are put into practice and taken to the social and political sphere, opponents feel more threatened and thus resort to more violent and .comprehensive confrontation

Conspiracy to overthrow the revolutionary system, spying, economic pressure fomenting pessimism and dejection among our people, attributing all our problems to the system's officials and portraying them as incompetent in meeting people's difficulties, and even resorting to military force to damage the revolution and its popular base, are among actions taken by opponents who see their interests .threatened by the new system

Our great nation in this period has experienced all sorts of enemy conspiracies. Just when the system and its managers need people's calm and optimism more than ever to focus all their thoughts and ingenuity on meeting society's needs, we encounter a heavy storm of enmity and conspiracy that sometimes forces us to focus our scarce resources on counteracting the danger posed by the foreign enemy and its domestic .sympathizers

These are among our greatest difficulties at this juncture, and there is no other way than to confront these realities. In the midst of these pressing difficulties, we must .persevere and march on with patience, confidence, and wisdom

Third, discord within. In the last hundred years our society has experienced two acute woes which have weakened' and undermined its fabric. These woes have become

more chronic and troubling at this sensitive juncture in our history. One is secular ,intellectualism

p: ۱۵۲

.the other being unenlightened religious dogma

The Secular Intellectual

Our society has, a religious identity. All throughout Shi'ism's history, the clergy have played a crucial role in awakening people to social, pathologies, inciting them to fight injustice, awakening their religious identity. In our history, Islam has perpetually invited people to unity in religious belief, protecting their individual and social dignity. With their incessant calls to social justice throughout the history of Islam, populist .religious leaders have served as society's most astute pathologists and healers

That is why Muslim societies have never harbored a negative view of religion. This stands in stark contrast to Western societies where unsavory and misguided religious .leaders have turned people away from religion

In the Muslim world, especially in Iran, whenever oppressed people have risen against tyranny, their activism has been channeled through religion. People have always witnessed the fiery and bloodied face of religious revolutionaries who have .risen to fight oppression and despotism

Our social conscience is replete with memories of the clash of true believers with hypocrites who have used religion to justify people's misery. Our part of the world has witnessed the historical antagonism between truth and justice-seeking religion and

.the oppressive and misguided views of religion that have been the tool of oppressors

Is it not true that, in the history of Islam, religion has opposed religious and secular tyranny? Have not most martyrs of truth been religious activists? Is it not the case that over the past hundred years, religion has been the greatest champion of the fight against

p: ۱۵۳

despotic agents of colonialism? Has not the experience of religious struggle, among other revolutionary and nationalist experiences-some of which are worthy of praise… ?been the most successful

Our society is religious and it is natural that secular intellectuals have never enjoyed a .social base or a place in our people's hearts

Unfortunately what has been called intellectualism in our society has been a movement that has been superficial and cut off from the people. Never has the voice of self-appointed intellectuals traveled beyond the cafeterias and coffee houses where they have posed as a political opposition. Even if people have heard their voice, they have found it incomprehensible. Thus, there has never been any mutual .understanding

And if public-minded intellectualism came to the fore and gained respect, it was through people who cast their claims in authentic, traditional, and religious terms. This was the reason for the vast popularity of figures such as Jalal Al-e Ahmad(۱) and Ali Shariati.(۲) These two were real intellectuals, and our society felt that they were a .part of the people and spoke to the people's pains and concerns

The secular intellectual, knowingly or not, pours water into the enemy's mill, the same

enemy who is against our independence, who opposes our people's authentic culture, religion, and freedom. History testifies that this group has on the whole been on the same side as, and has sometimes actively cooperated with, despotic systems .propped up by foreigners

But fortunately, because it lacks deep roots in our culture and people's souls, it

p: ۱۵۴

Translator's Note: Jalal Al-e Ahmad (۱۹۲۳-۱۹۶۹). Seminal and prolific Iranian writer - ۱ who popularized the effects of the cultural imperialism of the West or 'Westoxication' .among his generation

Translator's Note: Ali Shariati (۱۹۲۳-۱۹۷۷). Iranian sociologist and reformer of - ۲ religious thought who played an important role in bridging the gap between Islamic thought and modern Iranian intellectuals. His numerous books and speeches, widely disseminated before the ۱۹۷۹ revolution, were instrumental in arousing Islamic .revolutionary sentiment among Iranians

has not had much effect. Today also, I believe secular intellectuals present no real danger, even though they may foment chaos in the minds of the young and other susceptible parts of society, or provide a foothold and opening for the enemy to .penetrate society

Religions Dogma

The other main problem we face is the parochialism and regressive visions of dogmatic believers. Religious dogma is nothing more than ascribing sanctity and eternity to limited and incomplete human interpretations, and giving priority to .emotions over rationality and realistic appraisal

If we ask dogmatic believers-who may see themselves as thinkers and intellectuals-

what they expect from the revolution, they claim that they want a return to Islamic civilization. We must alert such people that their wishes are anachronistic. The specific thoughts' that underpinned Islamic civilization ended with the passing of that civilization. If it had maintained its dynamism, relevance and ability to provide .answers to people's problems, that civilization would have endured

Dogma presents the most formidable obstacle to institutionalizing a system that wishes to provide a model for the present and future of human life, a system based .on a more powerful logic than competing schools and ideologies

The effect of dogma on our society, which has a religious identity, is vast. Its negative effect is greater than secularism, especially because dogmatic believers usually project the aura of religious, legitimacy. Their religious' duties compel them to act but they have no connection to authentic Islam, the Islamic revolution, or to the present .and the future

Imam Khomeini(۱) especially in

Translator's Note: Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (۱۹۰۲?-۱۹۸۹). Leader of the Iranian -۱ .revolution of ۱۹۷۹ and the founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran

the last two years of his life, was deeply concerned with the danger that dogma and backward vision posed to the revolution's path and the progress and welfare of Islamic society. In line with all of Imam Khomeini's warnings, vigilance about this .phenomenon is crucial to us and the future of the Islamic revolution

The Void in Religious Intellectualism

Here I want to touch on one of the most important deficiencies of our society at this sensitive juncture, hoping that it spurs debate among thinkers, irrespective of .whether they accept my proposition or reject or modify it

In my view, the greatest defect we have in the sphere of thought and development is the lack or weakness of religious intellectualism, even though I see the ground as ripe .for its emergence and growth

An intellectual, in my view, is one who lives in his own time and understands the issues and problems confronting humanity in that period. He keenly pursues such knowledge, and because he understands the problems of the day, he represents the only hope for finding solutions to those problems. For how can we expect someone to ?solve a problem when he does not know that a problem exists

Here, moral rectitude will not suffice. Nor will knowledge by itself. A moral person who is a moving encyclopedia but lives outside his time, for whom the most pressing problems are for example the second and third Islamic centuries, cannot solve even the smallest of today's problems, for today's problems do not interest him. In contrast, the main

p: ۱۵۶

quality of an intellectual is that she lives in her own time, taking on a social responsibility, her mind constantly curious and restive about reality and human destiny. An intellectual is one who respects rationality and thinking and also knows the (value of freedom.(۱

?Who is a Religious Believer

A believer is one whose vision of being transcends the small cage of the material, and while he sees humans as having come from nature, he does not see them as limited to the natural world. Instead he sees every human as bigger than the whole of .nature, because nature is limited while humans are, in a way, limitless and eternal

Just as the questions and needs of humans know no limits, time and space cannot limit and circumscribe humans in their narrow bounds. For this reason, humans look at the future and at the past, and with the aid of their mental faculties break the bounds .of nature to find the gateway to transcend it

The religious intellectual is one who loves humanity, understands its problems, and feels a responsibility toward its destiny and respects human freedom. She feels that humans have a divine mission and wants freedom for them. Whatever blocks the path .to human growth and evolution, she deems as being against freedom

Our dynamic society at this sensitive juncture badly needs religious intellectuals. If religion and intellectualism are combined, we can hope that our great Islamic revolution will be the harbinger of a new era in human history. But if these two are separated, each

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۱ - My interpretation of the intellectual is based on convention. I use this concept to refer to actual, existing individuals. Others may have interpretations that do not allow a combination of intellectualism and religious belief. But it is unwarranted to confine .us to the prejudiced interpretation of a certain social group

.will endanger the health of society

When you mention God to secular intellectuals, they say they prefer to focus on humans. When you mention humans to the dogmatically religious, they say they

prefer God. But the religious intellectual seeks 'Godly humans', a creation whose .emergence is as pressing a need today as it will always be

I hope that through our revolution and a well-conceived connection between these two spheres-by connecting religious seminaries and the main centers of thinking in today's world, meaning universities-we will witness the emergence of the religious intellectual. This is a scenario that has neither the deficiencies of secular intellectualism nor those of dogmatic religious belief. Such a movement must shoulder the grand mission of our revolution and solve the crisis that is born out of the birth of a new system, all to benefit humanity, moving us toward a future replete with .fulfillment and growth

Biographical Note

Seyyed Muhammad Khatami was elected President of the Islamic Republic of Iran on May ۲۳, ۱۹۹۷, with over two-thirds of the popular vote. He was born in ۱۹۴۲ into a middle-class clerical family in the town of Ardakan, located in the province of Yazd in central Iran. His father, Grand Ayatollah Ruhollah Khatami, was widely respected for .his piety and progressive views

At the age of nineteen, Khatami left Ardakan to pursue religious studies in Qom until ۱۹۶۵, when he entered the University of Isfahan to study philosophy. From this time onward, he became active in Islamic politics. In ۱۹۶۹, he began

graduate studies in education at the University of Tehran. Two years later, he returned to Qom to pursue further religious studies in Islamic law, jurisprudence, and .philosophy

It was in Qom that he became more immersed in political activity. In ١٩٧٨, on the eve of the Iranian revolution, he was chosen to lead the Hamburg Islamic Institute in Germany, which played a pivotal role in organizing revolutionary activity among the Iranian Diaspora. From ١٩٨٢ to ١٩٩٢, he served as minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance. In ١٩٩٢ he was appointed assistant to the President and head of the .National Library of Iran, a position he held until his election to the Presidency

Mr. Khatami is familiar with English, Arabic, and German. He has published several books and articles, including: Bim-e Mowj (Fear of the Wave), ١٩٩٣, and Az Donya-ye Shahr ta Shahr-e Donya (From the City-World to the World-City), ١٩٩۴. He is particularly interested in the works of Farabi, Molla-Sadra, Sheykh Ansari, and Hafez. .He is married and has three children

p: ١۵٩

About center

In the name of Allah

هَلْيَسْتَوِيالَّذِينَيَعْلَمُونَوَالَّذِينَلَايَعْلَمُونَ

?Are those who know equal to those who do not know

al-Zumar: ٩

:Introduction

Ghaemiyeh Computer Research Institute of Isfahan, from ٢٠٠٧, under the authority of Ayatollah Haj SayyedHasanFaqihImami (God blesses his soul), by sincere and daily efforts of university and seminary elites and sophisticated groups began its activities .in religious, cultural and scientific fields

:Manifesto

Ghaemiyeh Computer Research Institute of Isfahan in order to facilitate and accelerate the accessibility of researchers to the books and tools of research, in the

field of Islamic science, and regarding the multiplicity and dispersion of active centers in this field

and numerous and inaccessible sources by a mere scientific intention and far from any kind of social, political, tribal and personal prejudices and currents, based on performing a project in the shape of (management of produced and published works from all Shia centers) tries to provide a rich and free collection of books and research papers for the experts, and helpful contents and discussions for the educated generation and all classes of people interested in reading, with various formats in the .cyberspace

:Our Goals are

(propagating the culture and teachings of Thaqalayn (Quran and Ahlulbayt p.b.u.t-

encouraging the populace particularly the youth in investigating the religious issues-

replacing useful contents with useless ones in the cellphones, tablets and computers-

providing services for seminary and university researchers-

spreading culture study in the publich-

paving the way for the publications and authors to digitize their works-

:Policies

acting according to the legal licenses-

relationship with similar centers-

avoiding parallel working-

merely presenting scientific contents-

mentioning the sources-

.It's obvious that all the responsibilities are due to the author

:Other activities of the institute

Publication of books, booklets and other editions-

Holding book reading competitions-

Producing virtual, three dimensional exhibitions, panoramas of religious and tourism- places

.Producing animations, computer games and etc-

Launching the website with this address: www.ghaemiyeh.com-

-Fabricatingdramatic and speech works

-Launching the system of answering religious, ethical and doctrinal questions

-Designing systems of accounting, media and mobile, automatic and handy systems, web kiosks

-Holding virtual educational courses for the public

-Holding virtual teacher-training courses

-Producing thousands of research software in three languages (Persian, Arabic and English) which can be performed in computers, tablets and cellphones and available and downloadable with eight international formats: JAVA, ANDROID, EPUB, CHM, PDF, HTML, CHM, GHB on the website

-Also producing four markets named "Ghaemiyeh Book Market" with Android, IOS, WINDOWS PHONE and WINDOWS editions

:Appreciation

We would appreciate the centers, institutes, publications, authors and all honorable friends who contributed their help and data to us to reach the holy goal we follow.

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Introduction of the Center – Ghaemiyeh Digital Library